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THE
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OF
OSCAR WILDE

THE WRITINGS OF OSCAR WILDE

THE WRITINGS OF OSCAR WILDE

VERA, OR THE NIHILISTS
AND THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

WITH AN INTRODUCTION TO
"THE DUCHESS OF PADUA" BY
SIR JOHNSTON FORBES-ROBERTSON

VOLUME
II

NEW YORK
GABRIEL WELLS
1925

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VERA
OR
THE NIHILISTS

This play was written in 1881, and is now published from the author's own copy, showing his corrections of and additions to the original text.

THE PERSONS IN THE PROLOGUE.

PETER SABOUROFF, an Inkeeper.

VERA SABOUROFF, his Daughter.

MICHAEL, a Peasant.

COLONEL KOTEMKIN

Scene
Russia.

Time
1795.

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY.

IVAN THE CZAR

PRINCE PAUL MARALOFFSKI, Prime Minister of Russia.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

COUNT ROUVALOFF

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

BARON RAFF

GENERAL KOTEMKIN

A PAGE

Nihilists

PETER TCHERNAVITCH, President of the Nihilists.

MICHAEL

ALEXIS IVANACIEVITCH, known as a Student of Medicine.

PROFESSOR MARFA

VERA SABOUROFF

Soldiers, Conspirators, &c.

Scene

Moscow.

Time

1800.

PROLOGUE.

SCENE—*A Russian Inn.*

Large door opening on snowy landscape at back of stage.

PETER SABOUROFF AND MICHAEL.

PETER

[*Warming his hands at a stove.*] Has Vera not come back yet, Michael?

MICHAEL

No, Father Peter, not yet; 'tis a good three miles to the post office, and she has to milk the cows besides, and that dun one is a rare plaguey creature for a wench to handle.

PETER

Why didn't you go with her, you young fool? she'll never love you unless you are always at her heels; women like to be bothered.

MICHAEL

She says I bother her too much already, Father Peter, and I fear she'll never love me after all.

PETER

Tut, tut, boy, why shouldn't she? you're young and wouldn't be ill-favoured either, had God or thy mother given thee another face. Aren't you one of Prince Maraloffski's game-keepers; and haven't you got a good grass farm, and the best cow in the village? What more does a girl want?

MICHAEL

But Vera, Father Peter—

PETER

Vera, my lad, has got too many ideas; I don't think much of ideas myself; I've got on well enough in life without 'em; why shouldn't my children? There's Dmitri! could have stayed here and kept the inn; many a young lad would have jumped at the offer in these hard times; but he, scatter-brained featherhead of a boy, must needs go off to Moscow to study the law! What does he want knowing about the law! let

a man do his duty, say I, and no one will trouble him.

MICHAEL

Ay! but, Father Peter, they say a good lawyer can break the law as often as he likes, and no one can say him nay.

PETER

That is about all they are good for; and there he stays, and has not written a line to us for four months now—a good son that, eh?

MICHAEL

Come, come, Father Peter, Dmitri's letters must have gone astray—perhaps the new postman can't read; he looks stupid enough, and Dmitri, why, he was the best fellow in the village. Do you remember how he shot the bear at the barn in the great winter?

PETER

Ay, it was a good shot; I never did a better myself.

MICHAEL

And as for dancing, he tired out three fiddlers Christmas come two years.

PETER

Ay, ay, he was a merry lad. It is the girl that has the seriousness—she goes about as solemn as a priest for days at a time.

MICHAEL

Vera is always thinking of others.

PETER

There is her mistake, boy. Let God and our little Father look to the world. It is none of my work to mend my neighbour's thatch. Why, last winter old Michael was frozen to death in his sleigh in the snowstorm, and his wife and children starved afterwards when the hard times came; but what business was it of mine? I didn't make the world. Let God and the Czar look to it. And then the blight came, and the black plague with it, and the priests couldn't bury the people fast enough, and they lay dead on the roads—men and women both. But what business was it of mine? I didn't make the world. Let God and the Czar look to it. Or two autumns ago, when the river overflowed on a sudden, and the children's school was carried away and drowned every girl and boy in it. I

didn't make the world—let God and the Czar look to it.

MICHAEL

But, Father Peter—

PETER

No, no, boy; no man could live if he took his neighbour's pack on his shoulders. [*Enter Vera in peasant's dress.*] Well, my girl, you've been long enough away—where is the letter?

VERA

There is none today, Father.

PETER

I knew it.

VERA

But there will be one to-morrow, Father.

PETER

Curse him, for an ungrateful son.

VERA

Oh, Father, don't say that; he must be sick.

PETER

Ay! sick of profligacy, perhaps.

VERA

How dare you say that of him, Father? You know that is not true.

PETER

Where does the money go, then? Michael, listen. I gave Dmitri half his mother's fortune to bring with him to pay the lawyer folk of Moscow. He has only written three times, and every time for more money. He got it, not at my wish, but at hers [*pointing to Vera*], and now for five months, close on six almost, we have heard nothing from him.

VERA

Father, he will come back.

PETER

Ay! the prodigals always return; but let him never darken my doors again.

VERA

[*Sitting down pensive.*] Some evil has come on him; he must be dead! Oh! Michael, I am so wretched about Dmitri.

MICHAEL

Will you never love any one but him, Vera?

VERA

[*Smiling.*] I don't know; there is so much else to do in the world but love.

MICHAEL

Nothing else worth doing, Vera.

PETER

What noise is that, Vera? [*A metallic clink is heard.*]

VERA

[*Rising and going to the door.*] I don't know, Father; it is not like the cattle bells, or I would think Nicholas had come from the fair. Oh! Father! it is soldiers!—coming down the hill—there is one of them on horseback. How pretty they look! But there are some men with them with chains on! They must be robbers. Oh! don't let them in, Father; I couldn't look at them.

PETER

Men in chains! Why, we are in luck, my child! I heard this was to be the new road to Siberia, to bring the prisoners to the mines; but I didn't believe it. My fortune is made! Bustle,

Vera, bustle! I'll die a rich man after all. There will be no lack of good customers now. An honest man should have the chance of making his living out of rascals now and then.

VERA

Are these men rascals, Father? What have they done?

PETER

I reckon they're some of those Nihilists the priest warns us against. Don't stand there idle, my girl.

VERA

I suppose, then, they are all wicked men.

[*Sound of soldiers outside; cry of "Halt!" enter Russian officer with a body of soldiers and eight men in chains, raggedly dressed; one of them on entering hurriedly puts his coat above his ears and hides his face; some soldiers guard the door, others sit down; the prisoners stand.*]

COLONEL

Innkeeper!

PETER

Yes, Colonel.

COLONEL

[*Pointing to Nihilists.*] Give these men some bread and water.

PETER

[*To himself.*] I shan't make much out of that order.

COLONEL

As for myself, what have you got fit to eat?

PETER

Some good dried venison, your Excellency—and some rye whisky.

COLONEL

Nothing else?

PETER

Why, more whisky, your Excellency.

COLONEL

What clods these peasants are! You have a better room than this?

PETER

Yes, sir.

COLONEL

Bring me there. Sergeant, post your picket outside, and see that these scoundrels do not communicate with any one. No letter writing, you dogs, or you'll be flogged for it. Now for the venison. [*To Peter bowing before him.*] Get out of the way, you fool! Who is that girl? [*sees Vera.*]

PETER

My daughter, your Highness.

COLONEL

Can she read and write?

PETER

Ay, that she can, sir.

COLONEL

Then she is a dangerous woman. No peasant should be allowed to do anything of the kind. Till your fields, store your harvest, pay your taxes, and obey your masters—that is your duty.

VERA

Who are our masters?

COLONEL

Young woman, these men are going to the mines for life for asking the same foolish question.

VERA

Then they have been unjustly condemned.

PETER

Vera, keep your tongue quiet. She is a foolish girl, sir, who talks too much.

COLONEL

Every woman does talk too much. Come, where is this venison? Count, I am waiting for you. How can you see anything in a girl with coarse hands? [*He passes with Peter and his aide-de-camp into an inner room.*]

VERA

[*To one of the Nihilists.*] Won't you sit down? you must be tired.

SERGEANT

Come now, young woman, no talking to my prisoners.

VERA

I shall speak to them. How much do you want?

SERGEANT

How much have you?

VERA

Will you let these men sit down if I give you this? [*Takes off her peasant's necklace.*] It is all I have; it was my mother's.

SERGEANT

Well, it looks pretty enough, and it is heavy too. What do you want with these men?

VERA

They are hungry and tired. Let me go to them?

ONE OF THE SOLDIERS

Let the wench be, if she pays us.

SERGEANT

Well, have your way. If the Colonel sees you, you may have to come with us, my pretty one.

VERA

[*Advances to the Nihilists.*] Sit down; you must be tired. [*Serves them food.*] What are you?

PRISONER

Nihilists.

VERA

Who put you in chains?

PRISONER

Our father, the Czar.

VERA

Why?

PRISONER

For loving liberty too well.

VERA

[*To prisoner who hides his face.*] What did you want to do?

DMITRI

To give liberty to thirty millions of people enslaved to one man.

VERA

[*Startled at the voice.*] What is your name?

DMITRI

I have no name.

VERA

Where are your friends?

DMITRI

I have no friends.

VERA

Let me see your face.

DMITRI

You will see nothing but suffering in it. They have tortured me.

VERA

[*Tears the cloak from his face.*] Oh, God! Dmitri! my brother!

DMITRI

Hush! Vera; be calm. You must not let my father know; it would kill him. I thought I could free Russia. I heard men talk of Liberty one night in a café. I had never heard the word before. It seemed to be a new god they spoke

of. I joined them. It was there all the money went. Five months ago they seized us. They found me printing the paper. I am going to the mines for life. I could not write. I thought it would be better to let you think I was dead; for they are bringing me to a living tomb.

VERA

[*Looking round.*] You must escape, Dmitri. I will take your place.

DMITRI

Impossible! You can only revenge us.

VERA

I shall revenge you.

DMITRI

Listen! there is a house in Moscow—

SERGEANT

Prisoners, attention!—the Colonel is coming—young woman, your time is up.

[*Enter Colonel, Aide-de-camp and Peter.*]

PETER

I hope your Highness is pleased with the venison. I shot it myself.

COLONEL

It had been better had you talked less about it. Sergeant, get ready. [*Gives purse to Peter.*] Here, you cheating rascal!

PETER

My fortune is made! Long live Your Highness. I hope Your Highness will come often this way.

COLONEL

By Saint Nicholas, I hope not. It is too cold here for me. [*To Vera.*] Young girl, don't ask questions again about what does not concern you. I will not forget your face.

VERA

Nor I yours, or what you are doing.

COLONEL

You peasants are getting too saucy since you ceased to be serfs, and the knout is the best school for you to learn politics in. Sergeant, proceed.

[*The Colonel turns and goes to top of stage. The prisoners pass out double file; as Dmitri passes Vera he lets a piece of paper fall on the*

ground; she puts her foot on it and remains immobile.

PETER

[*Who has been counting the money the Colonel gave him.*] Long life to your Highness. I will hope to see another batch soon. [*Suddenly catches sight of Dmitri as he is going out of the door, and screams and rushes up.*] Dmitri! Dmitri! my God! what brings you here? he is innocent, I tell you. I'll pay for him. Take your money [*flings money on the ground*], take all I have, give me my son. Villains! Villains! where are you bringing him?

COLONEL

To Siberia, old man.

PETER

No, no; take me instead.

COLONEL

He is a Nihilist.

PETER

You lie! you lie! He is innocent. [*The soldiers force him back with their guns and shut the door against him. He beats with his fists*

against it.] Dmitri! Dmitri! a Nihilist! [*Falls down on floor.*]

VERA

[*Who has remained motionless, picks up paper now from under her feet and reads.*] "99 Rue Tchernavaya, Moscow. To strangle whatever nature is in me; neither to love nor to be loved; neither to pity nor to be pitied; neither to marry nor to be given in marriage, till the end is come." My brother, I shall keep the oath. [*Kisses the paper.*] You shall be revenged!

Vera stands immobile, holding paper in her lifted hand. Peter is lying on the floor. Michael, who has just come in, is bending over him.]

FIRST ACT.[1]

SCENE—99 *Rue Tchernavaya, Moscow. A large garret lit by oil lamps hung from ceiling. Some masked men standing silent and apart from one another. A man in a scarlet mask is writing at a table. Door at back. Man in yellow with drawn sword at it. Knocks heard. Figures in cloaks and masks enter.*

Password. Per crucem ad lucem.

Answer. Per sanguinem ad libertatem.

[*Clock strikes. Conspirators form a semicircle in the middle of the stage.*]

[2] PRESIDENT

What is the word?

FIRST CONSPIRATOR

Nabat.

PRESIDENT

The answer?

SECOND CONSPIRATOR

Kalit.

PRESIDENT

What hour is it?

THIRD CONSPIRATOR

The hour to suffer.

PRESIDENT

What day?

FOURTH CONSPIRATOR

The day of oppression.

PRESIDENT

What year?

FIFTH CONSPIRATOR

Since the Revolution of France, the ninth year.[2]

PRESIDENT

How many are we in number?

SIXTH CONSPIRATOR

Ten, nine, and three.

PRESIDENT

The Galilæan had less to conquer the world; but what is our mission?

SEVENTH CONSPIRATOR

To give freedom.

PRESIDENT

Our creed?

EIGHTH CONSPIRATOR

To annihilate.

PRESIDENT

Our duty?

NINTH CONSPIRATOR

To obey.

PRESIDENT

Brothers, the questions have been answered well. There are none but Nihilists present. Let us see each other's faces! [*The Conspirators unmask.*] Michael, recite the oath.

MICHAEL

To strangle whatever nature is in us; neither to love nor to be loved, neither to pity nor to be pitied, neither to marry nor to be given in marriage, till the end is come; to stab secretly by night; to drop poison in the glass; to set father against son, and husband against wife; without fear, without hope, without future, to suffer, to annihilate, to revenge.

PRESIDENT

Are we all agreed?

CONSPIRATORS

We are all agreed. [*They disperse in various directions about the stage.*]

PRESIDENT

'Tis after the hour, Michael, and she is not yet here.

MICHAEL

Would that she were! We can do little without her.

ALEXIS

She cannot have been seized, President? but the police are on her track, I know.

MICHAEL

You always seem to know a good deal about the movements of the police in Moscow—too much for an honest conspirator.

PRESIDENT

If those dogs have caught her, [3] the red flag of the people will float on a barricade in [3] every street till we find her! It was foolish of her to go to the Grand Duke's ball. I told her so, but she said she wanted to see the Czar and all his cursed brood face to face.

ALEXIS

Gone to the State ball?

MICHAEL

I have no fear. She is as hard to capture as a she-wolf is, and twice as dangerous; besides, she is well disguised. But is there any news from the Palace to-night, President? What is that bloody [4] despot doing now besides torturing his only son? Have any of you seen him? One hears strange stories about him. They say he loves the people; but a king's son never does that. You cannot breed them like that.

PRESIDENT

Since he came back from abroad a year ago his father has kept him in close prison in his palace.

MICHAEL

An excellent training to make him a tyrant in his turn; but is there any news, I say?

PRESIDENT

A council is to be held to-morrow, at four o'clock, on some secret business the spies cannot find out.

MICHAEL

A council in a king's palace is sure to be about some bloody work or other. But in what room is this council to be held?

PRESIDENT

[*Reading from letter.*] In the yellow tapestry room called after the Empress Catherine.

MICHAEL

I care not for such long-sounding names. I would know where it is.

PRESIDENT

I cannot tell, Michael. I know more about the insides of prisons than of palaces.

MICHAEL

[*Speaking suddenly to Alexis.*] Where is this room, Alexis?

ALEXIS

It is on the first floor, looking out on to the inner courtyard. But why do you ask, Michael?

MICHAEL

Nothing, nothing, boy! I merely take a great interest in the Czar's life and movements and I knew you could tell me all about the palace. Every poor student of medicine in Moscow knows all about king's houses. It is their duty, is it not?

ALEXIS

[*Aside.*] Can Michael suspect me? There is something strange in his manner to-night. Why doesn't she come? The whole fire of revolution seems fallen into dull ashes when she is not here.

[5] MICHAEL

Have you cured many patients lately, at your hospital, boy?

ALEXIS

There is one who lies sick to death I would fain cure, but cannot.

MICHAEL

Ay, and who is that?

ALEXIS

Russia, our mother.

MICHAEL

The curing of Russia is surgeon's business, and must be done by the knife. I like not your method of medicine.[5]

PRESIDENT

Professor, we have read the proofs of your last article; it is very good indeed.

MICHAEL

What is it about, Professor?

PROFESSOR

The subject, my good brother, is assassination considered as a method of political reform.

MICHAEL

I think little of pen and ink in revolutions. One dagger will do more than a hundred epigrams. Still, let us read this scholar's last production. Give it to me. I will read it myself.

PROFESSOR

Brother, you never mind your stops; let Alexis read it.

MICHAEL

Ay! he is as tripping of speech as if he were some young aristocrat; but for my own part I care not for the stops so that the sense be plain.

ALEXIS

[*Reading.*] "The past has belonged to the tyrant, and he has defiled it; ours is the future, and we shall make it holy." Ay! let us make the future holy; let there be one revolution at least which is not bred in crime, nurtured in murder!

MICHAEL

They have spoken to us by the sword, and by the sword we shall answer! You are too delicate for us, Alexis. There should be none here but

men whose hands are rough with labour or red with blood.

PRESIDENT

Peace, Michael, peace! He is the bravest heart among us.

MICHAEL

[*Aside.*] He will need to be brave to-night.

[*The sound of the sleigh bells is heard outside.*]

VOICE

[*Outside.*] Per crucem ad lucem.

Answer of man on guard. Per sanguinem ad libertatem.

MICHAEL

Who is that?

VERA

God save the people!

PRESIDENT

Welcome, Vera, welcome! [6] We have been sick at heart till we saw you; but now methinks the star of freedom has come to wake us from the night.[6]

VERA

[7] It is night, indeed, brother! Night without moon or star![7] Russia is smitten to the heart! The man Ivan whom men call the Czar strikes now at our mother with a dagger deadlier than ever forged by tyranny against a people's life!

MICHAEL

What has the tyrant[8] done now?

VERA

To-morrow martial law is to be proclaimed in Russia.

OMNES

Martial law! We are lost! We are lost!

ALEXIS

Martial law! Impossible!

MICHAEL

Fool, nothing is impossible in Russia but reform.

VERA

Ay, martial law. The last right to which the people clung has been taken from them. With-

out trial, without appeal, without accuser even, our brothers will be taken from their houses, shot in the streets like dogs, sent away to die in the snow, to starve in the dungeon, to rot in the mine. Do you know what martial law means? It means the strangling of a whole nation. 'The streets will be filled with soldiers night and day; there will be sentinels at every door.' No man dare walk abroad now but the spy or the traitor. Cooped up in the dens we hide in, meeting by stealth, speaking with bated breath; what good can we do now for Russia?

PRESIDENT

We can suffer at least.

VERA

We have done that too much already. The hour is now come to annihilate and to revenge.

PRESIDENT

Up to this the people have borne everything.

VERA

Because they have understood nothing. But now we, the Nihilists, have given them the tree of knowledge to eat of, and the day of silent suffering is over for Russia.

MICHAEL

Martial law, Vera! This is fearful tidings you bring.

PRESIDENT

It is the death warrant of liberty in Russia.

VERA

Or the tocsin of [10] revolution.

MICHAEL

Are you sure it is true?

VERA

Here is the proclamation. I stole it myself at the ball to-night from a young fool, one of Prince Paul's secretaries, who had been given it to copy. It was that which made me so late.

[*Vera hands proclamation to Michael, who reads it.*]

MICHAEL

"To insure the public safety—martial law. By order of the Czar, father of his people." The father of his people!

VERA

Ay! a father whose name shall not be hallowed, whose kingdom shall change to a republic, whose trespasses shall not be forgiven him, because he has robbed us of our daily bread; with whom is neither might, nor right, nor glory, now or for ever.

PRESIDENT

It must be about this that the council meet to-morrow. It has not yet been signed.

ALEXIS

It shall not be while I have a tongue to plead with.

MICHAEL

Or while I have hands to smite with.

VERA

Martial law! O God, how easy it is for a king to kill his people by thousands, but we cannot rid ourselves of one crowned man in Europe! What is there of awful majesty in these men which makes the hand unsteady, the dagger treacherous, the pistol-shot harmless? Are they not men of like passions with ourselves, vulner-

able to the same diseases, of flesh and blood not different from our own? What made Olgiati tremble at the supreme crisis of that Roman life, [11] and Guido's nerve fail him when he should have been of iron and of steel? A plague, I say, on these fools of Naples, Berlin, and Spain! [11] Methinks that if I stood face to face with one of the crowned men my eye would see more clearly, my aim be more sure, my whole body gain a strength and power that was not my own! Oh, to think what stands between us and freedom in Europe! a few old men, wrinkled, feeble, tottering dotards whom a boy could strangle for a ducat, or a woman stab in a night-time. And these are the things that keep us from democracy, that keep us from liberty. But now methinks the brood of men is dead and the dull earth grown sick of childbearing, else would no crowned dog pollute God's air by living.

OMNES

Try us! Try us! Try us!

MICHAEL

We shall try thee, too, some day, Vera.

VERA

I pray God thou mayest! Have I not

strangled whatever nature is in me, and shall I not keep my oath?

MICHAEL

[*To President.*] Martial law, President! Come, there is no time to be lost. We have twelve hours yet before us till the council meet. [12] Twelve hours! One can overthrow a dynasty in less time than that.[12]

PRESIDENT

[13] Ay! or lose one's own head.[13]

[*Michael and the President retire to one corner of the stage and sit whispering. Vera takes up the proclamation, and reads it to herself. Alexis watches and suddenly rushes up to her.*]

ALEXIS

Vera!

VERA

Alexis, you here! Foolish boy, have I not prayed you to stay away? All of us here are doomed to die before our time, fated to expiate by suffering whatever good we do; but you, with your [14] bright boyish face,[14] you are too young to die yet.

ALEXIS

One is never too young to die for one's country!

VERA

Why do you come here night after night?

ALEXIS

Because I love the people.

VERA

But your fellow-students must miss you. Are there no traitors among them? You know what spies there are in the University here. O Alexis, you must go! You see how desperate suffering has made us. There is no room here for a nature like yours. You must not come again.

ALEXIS

Why do you think so poorly of me? Why should I live while my brothers suffer?

VERA

You spake to me of your mother once. You said you loved her. Oh, think of her!

ALEXIS

I have no mother now but Russia, my life is

hers to take or give away; but to-night I am here to see you. They tell me you are leaving for Novgorod to-morrow.

VERA

I must. They are getting faint-hearted there, and I would fan the flame of this revolution into such a blaze that the eyes of all kings in Europe shall be blinded. If martial law is passed they will need me all the more there. There is no limit, it seems, to the tyranny of one man; but there shall be a limit to the suffering of a whole people.

ALEXIS

God knows it, I am with you. But you must not go. [15] The police are watching every train for you.[15] When you are seized they have orders to place you without trial in the lowest dungeon of the palace.[16] I know it—no matter how. [17] Oh, think how without you the sun goes from our life, how the people will lose their leader and liberty her priestess.[17] Vera, you must not go!

VERA

If you wish it, I will stay. I would live a little longer for freedom, a little longer for Russia.

ALEXIS

When you die then Russia is smitten indeed; when you die then I shall lose all hope—all. . . . Vera, this is fearful news you bring—martial law—it is too terrible. I knew it not, by my soul, I knew it not!

VERA

How could you have known it? It is too well laid a plot for that. This great White Czar, whose hands are red with the blood of the people he has murdered, whose soul is black with his iniquity, is the cleverest conspirator of us all. Oh, how could Russia bear two hearts like yours and his!

ALEXIS

Vera, the Emperor was not always like this. There was a time when he loved the people. It is that devil, whom God curse, Prince Paul Maraloffski who has brought him to this. To-

morrow, I swear it, I shall plead for the people to the Emperor.

VERA

Plead to the Czar! Foolish boy, it is only those who are sentenced to death that ever see our Czar. Besides, what should he care for a voice that pleads for mercy? The cry of a strong nation in its agony has not moved that heart of stone.

ALEXIS

[*Aside.*] Yet I shall plead to him. They can but kill me.

PROFESSOR

Here are the proclamations, Vera. Do you think they will do?

VERA

I shall read them. [18] How fair he looks? [18] Methinks he never seemed so noble as to-night. Liberty is blessed in having such a lover.

ALEXIS

Well, President, what are you deep in?

MICHAEL

We are thinking of the best way of killing bears. [*Whispers to President and leads him aside.*]

PROFESSOR

[*To Vera.*] And the letters [19] from our brothers at Paris and Berlin. What answer shall we send to them? [19]

VERA

[*Takes them mechanically.*] Had I not strangled nature, sworn neither to love nor to be loved, methinks [20] I might have loved him. Oh, I am a fool, a traitor myself, a traitor myself! But why did he come amongst us with his bright [21] young face, his heart aflame for liberty, his pure white soul? Why does he make me feel at times as if I would have him as my king, Republican though I be? Oh, fool, fool, fool! False to your oath! weak as water! Have done! Remember what you are—a Nihilist, a Nihilist!

PRESIDENT

[*To Michael.*] But you will be seized, Michael.

MICHAEL

I think not. I will wear the uniform of the Imperial Guard, and the Colonel on duty is one of us. It is on the first floor, you remember; so I can take a long shot.

PRESIDENT

Shall I tell the brethren?

[22] MICHAEL

Not a word, not a word! There is a traitor amongst us.

VERA

Come, are these the proclamations? Yes, they will do; yes, they will do. Send five hundred to Kiev and Odessa and Novgorod, five hundred to Warsaw, and have twice the number distributed among the Southern Provinces, though these dull Russian peasants care little for our proclamations, and less for our martyrdoms. When the blow is struck it must be from the town, not from the country.

MICHAEL

Ay, and by the sword, not by the goose-quill.

VERA

Where are the letters from Poland?

PROFESSOR

Here.

VERA

Unhappy Poland! The eagles of Russia have fed on her heart. We must not forget our brothers there.[22]

PRESIDENT

Is this true, Michael?

MICHAEL

Ay, I stake my life on it.

PRESIDENT

[23] Let the doors be locked, then.[23] Alexis Ivanacievitch entered on our roll of the brothers as a Student of the School of Medicine at Moscow. Why did you not tell us of this bloody scheme[24] of martial law?

ALEXIS

I, President?

MICHAEL

Ay, you! You knew it, none better. Such weapons as these are not forged in a day. Why

did you not tell us of it? A week ago there had been time [25] to lay the mine, to raise the barricade, to strike one blow at least for liberty.[26] But now the hour is past! It is too late, [26] it is too late! [26] Why did you keep it a secret from us, I say?

ALEXIS

Now by the hand of freedom, Michael, my brother, you wrong me. I knew nothing of this hideous law. By my soul, my brothers, I knew not of it! How should I know?

MICHAEL

Because you are a traitor! Where did you go when you left us the night of our last meeting here?

[27] ALEXIS

To mine own house, Michael.[27]

MICHAEL

Liar! I was on your track. You left here an hour after midnight. Wrapped in a large cloak, you crossed the river in a boat a mile below the second bridge, and gave the ferryman a gold piece, you, the poor student of medicine! You doubled back twice, and hid in an archway so long that I had almost made up my mind to stab

you at once, only that I am fond of hunting. So! you thought that you had baffled all pursuit, did you? Fool! I am a bloodhound that never loses the scent. I followed you from street to street. At last I saw you pass swiftly across the Place St. Isaac, whisper to the guards the secret password, enter the palace by a private door with your own key.

CONSPIRATORS

The palace!

VERA

Alexis!

MICHAEL

I waited. All through the dreary watches of our long Russian night I waited, that I might kill you with your Judas hire still hot in your hand. But you never came out; you never left that palace at all. I saw the blood-red sun rise through the yellow fog over the murky town; I saw a new day of oppression dawn on Russia; but you never came out. So you pass nights in the palace, do you? You know the password for the guards! you have a key to a secret door. Oh, you are a spy—you are a spy! I never

trusted you, [28] with your soft white hands, your curled hair, your pretty graces.[28] You have no mark of suffering about you; you cannot be of the people. You are a spy—[29] a spy—traitor.[29]

OMNES

Kill him! Kill him! [*Draw their knives.*]

VERA

[*Rushing in front of Alexis.*] Stand back, I say, Michael! Stand back all! [30] Do not dare [30] lay a hand upon him! He is the noblest heart amongst us.

OMNES

Kill him! Kill him! He is a spy!

VERA

Dare to lay a finger on him and I leave you all to yourselves.

PRESIDENT

Vera, did you not hear what Michael said of him? He stayed all night in the Czar's palace. He has a password and a private key. What else should he be but a spy?

VERA

Bah! I do not believe Michael. It is a lie! It is [31] a lie! Alexis, say it is a lie!

ALEXIS

It is true. Michael has told what he saw. I did pass that night in the Czar's palace. Michael has spoken the truth.

VERA

Stand back, I say; stand back! Alexis, I do not care. I trust you; you would not betray us; you would not sell the people for money. You are honest, true! Oh, say you are no spy!

ALEXIS

Spy? You know I am not. I am with you, my brothers, to the death.

MICHAEL

Ay, to your own death.

ALEXIS

Vera, you [32] know I am true.

VERA

I know it well.

PRESIDENT

Why are you here, traitor?

ALEXIS

Because I love the people.

MICHAEL

Then you can be a martyr for them?

VERA

You must kill me first, Michael, before you lay a finger on him.

PRESIDENT

Michael, we dare not lose Vera. It is her whim to let this boy live. We can keep him here to-night. Up to this he has not betrayed us.

[*Tramp of soldiers outside, knocking at door.*] [33]

VOICE

Open in the name of the Emperor!

MICHAEL

He *has* betrayed us. This is your doing, spy!

PRESIDENT

Come, Michael, come. We have no time to

cut one another's throats while we have our own heads to save.

VOICE

Open in the name of the Emperor!

PRESIDENT

Brothers, be masked all of you. [34] Michael, open the door. It is our only chance.[34]

[*Enter General Kotemkin and soldiers.*]

GENERAL

All honest citizens should be in their own houses at an hour before midnight, and not more than five people have a right to meet privately. Have you not noticed the proclamation, fellow?

MICHAEL

Ay, you have spoiled every honest [35] wall in Moscow with it.

VERA

Peace, Michael, peace. Nay, Sir, we knew it not. We are a company of strolling players travelling from Samara to Moscow to amuse His Imperial Majesty the Czar.

GENERAL

But I heard loud voices before I entered. What was that?

VERA

We were rehearsing a new tragedy.

GENERAL

Your answers are too *honest* to be true. Come, let me see who you are. Take off those players' masks. By St. Nicholas, my beauty, if your face matches your figure, you must be a choice morsel! Come, I say, pretty one; I would sooner see your face than those of all the others.

PRESIDENT

O God! if he sees it is Vera, we are all lost!

GENERAL

No coquetting, my girl. Come, unmask, I say. or I shall tell my guards to do it for you.

ALEXIS

Stand back, I say, General Kotemkin!

GENERAL

Who are you, fellow, that talks with such a tripping tongue to your betters? [*Alexis takes*

his mask off.] His Imperial Highness the Czarevitch!

OMNES

The Czarevitch! [36] It is all over! [36]

[37] PRESIDENT

He will give us up to the soldiers.[37]

MICHAEL

[*To Vera.*] Why did you not let me kill him? Come, we must fight to the death for it.

VERA

Peace! he will not betray us.

ALEXIS

A whim of mine, General! You know how my father keeps me from the world and imprisons me in the palace. I should really be bored to death if I could not get out at night in disguise sometimes, and have some romantic adventure in town. I fell in with these honest folks a few hours ago.

GENERAL

But, your Highness—

ALEXIS

Oh, they are excellent actors, I assure you. If you had come in ten minutes ago, you would have witnessed a most interesting scene.

GENERAL

Actors, are they, Prince?

ALEXIS

Ay, and very ambitious actors, too. They only care to play before kings.

GENERAL

I' faith, your Highness, I was in hopes I had made a good haul of Nihilists.[38]

ALEXIS

Nihilists in Moscow, General! with you as head of the police? Impossible!

GENERAL

So I always tell your Imperial father. But I heard at the council to-day that that woman Vera Sabouroff, the head of them, had been seen in this very city. The Emperor's face turned as white as the snow outside. I think I never saw such terror in any man before.

ALEXIS

She is a dangerous woman, then, this Vera Sabouroff?

GENERAL

The most dangerous in all Europe.

ALEXIS

Did you ever see her, General?

GENERAL

Why, five years ago, when I was a plain Colonel, I remember her, your Highness, a common waiting girl in an inn. If I had known then what she was going to turn out, I would have flogged her to death on the roadside. She is not a woman at all; she is a sort of devil! For the last eighteen months I have been hunting her, and caught sight of her once last September outside Odessa.

ALEXIS

How did you let her go, General?

GENERAL

I was by myself, and she shot one of my horses just as I was gaining on her. If I see her again

I shan't miss my chance. The Emperor has put twenty thousand roubles on her head.

ALEXIS

I hope you will get it, General; but meanwhile you are frightening these honest people out of their wits, and disturbing the tragedy. Good night, General.

GENERAL

Yes; but I should like to see their faces, your Highness.

ALEXIS

No, General; you must not ask that; you know how these gipsies hate to be stared at.

GENERAL

Yes. But, your Highness—

ALEXIS

[*Haughtily.*] General, they are my friends, that is enough. And, General, not a word of this little adventure here, you understand. I shall rely on you.

GENERAL

I shall not forget, Prince. But shall we not see you back to the palace? The State ball is almost over and you are expected.

ALEXIS

I shall be there; but I shall return alone. Remember, not a word about my strolling players.

GENERAL

Or your pretty gipsy, eh, Prince? your pretty gipsy! I' faith, I should like to see her before I go; she has such fine eyes through her mask. Well, good night, your Highness; good night.

ALEXIS

Good night, General.

[*Exit General and the soldiers.*]

VERA

[*Throwing off her mask.*] Saved! and by you!

ALEXIS

[*Clasping her hand.*] Brothers, you trust me now?

ACT-DROP.

SECOND ACT.

SCENE—*Council Chamber in the Emperor's Palace, hung with yellow tapestry. Table, with chair of State, set for the Czar; window behind, opening on to a balcony. As the scene progresses the light outside gets darker.*

Present—PRINCE PAUL MARALOFFSKI, PRINCE PETROVITCH, COUNT ROUVALOFF, BARON RAFF, COUNT PETOUCHOF.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

So our young scatter-brained Czarevitch has been forgiven at last, and is to take his seat here again.

PRINCE PAUL

Yes; if that is not meant as an extra punishment. For my own part, at least, I find these Cabinet Councils extremely exhausting.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Naturally; you are always speaking.

PRINCE PAUL

No; I think it must be that I have to listen sometimes.

COUNT R.

Still, anything is better than being kept in a sort of prison, like he was—never allowed to go out into the world.

PRINCE PAUL

My dear Count, for romantic young people like he is, the world always looks best at a distance; and a prison where one's allowed to order one's own dinner is not at all a bad place. [*Enter the Czarevitch. The courtiers rise.*] Ah! good afternoon, Prince. Your Highness is looking a little pale to-day.

CZAREVITCH

[*Slowly, after a pause.*] I want change of air.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Smiling.*] A most revolutionary sentiment! Your Imperial father would highly disapprove of any reforms with the thermometer in Russia.

CZAREVITCH

[*Bitterly.*] My Imperial father had kept me for six months in this dungeon of a palace. This morning he has me suddenly woke up to see some wretched Nihilists hung; it sickened me, the bloody butchery, though it was a noble thing to see how well these men can die.

PRINCE PAUL

When you are as old as I am, Prince, you will understand that there are few things easier than to live badly and to die well.

CZAREVITCH

Easy to die well! A lesson experience cannot have taught you, whatever you may know of a bad life.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*] Experience, the name men give to their mistakes. I never commit any.

CZAREVITCH

[*Bitterly.*] No; crimes are more in your line.

PRINCE PETRO

[*To the Czarevitch.*] The Emperor was a

good deal agitated about your late appearance at the ball last night, Prince.

[1] COUNT R.

[*Laughing.*] I believe he thought the Nihilists had broken into the palace and carried you off.

BARON RAFF

If they had you would have missed a charming dance.[1]

PRINCE PAUL

And[2] an excellent supper. Gringoire really excelled himself in his salad. Ah! you may laugh, Baron; but to make a good salad is a much more difficult thing than cooking accounts. To make a good salad is to be a brilliant diplomatist—the problem is so entirely the same in both cases. To know exactly how much oil one must put with one's vinegar.

BARON RAFF

A cook and a diplomatist! an excellent parallel. If I had a son who was a fool I'd make him one or the other.

PRINCE PAUL

I see your father did not hold the same opinion, Baron. But, believe me, you are wrong to run down cookery. For myself, the only immortality I desire is to invent a new sauce. I have never had time enough to think seriously about it, but I feel it is in me, I feel it is in me.

CZAREVITCH

You have certainly missed your *metier*,[8] Prince Paul; the *cordon bleu* would have suited you much better than the Grand Cross of Honour. But you know you could never have worn your white apron well; you would have soiled it too soon, your hands are not clean enough.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Bowing.*] Que voulez vous? I manage your father's business.

CZAREVITCH

[*Bitterly.*] You mismanage my father's business, you mean! Evil genius of his life that you are! before you came there was some love left in him. It is you who have embittered his nature, poured into his ear the poison of treacherous

counsel, made him hated by the whole people, made him what he is—a tyrant!

[*The courtiers look significantly at each other.*]

PRINCE PAUL

[*Calmly.*] I see your Highness does want change of air. But I have been an eldest son myself. [*Lights a cigarette.*] I know what it is when a father won't die to please one.

[*The Czarevitch goes to the top of the stage, and leans against the window, looking out.*]

PRINCE PETROVITCH

[*To Baron Raff.*] Foolish boy! [4] He will be sent into exile, or worse, if he is not careful.[4]

BARON RAFF

Yes.[5] What a mistake it is to be sincere!

PRINCE PETROVITCH

The only folly you have never committed, Baron.

BARON RAFF

One has only one head, you know, Prince.

PRINCE PAUL

My dear Baron, your head is the last thing any one would wish to take from you. [*Pulls out snuffbox and offers it to Prince Petrovitch.*]

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Thanks, Prince! Thanks!

PRINCE PAUL

Very delicate, isn't it? I get it direct from Paris. But under this vulgar Republic everything has degenerated over there. "Cotelettes a l'impériale" vanished, of course, with the Bourbon, and omelettes went out with the Orleanists. La belle France is entirely ruined, Prince, through bad morals and worse cookery. [*Enter the Marquis de Poivrard.*] Ah! Marquis. I trust Madame la Marquise is well.

MARQUIS DE P.

You ought to know better than I do, Prince Paul; you see more *of* her.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Bowing.*] Perhaps I see more *in* her, Marquis. Your wife is really a charming woman, so full of *esprit,* and so satirical too; she talks continually of you when we are together.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

[*Looking at the clock.*] His majesty is a little late to-day, is he not?

PRINCE PAUL

What has happened to you, my dear Petrovitch? you seem quite out of sorts. You haven't quarrelled with your cook, I hope? What a tragedy that would be for you; you would lose all your friends.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

I fear I wouldn't be so fortunate as that. You forget I would still have my purse.[6] But you are wrong for once; my chef and I are on excellent[7] terms.

PRINCE PAUL

Then your creditors or Mademoiselle Vera Sabouroff have been writing to you? I find both of them such excellent correspondents. But really you needn't be alarmed. I find the most violent proclamations from the Executive Committee, as they call it, left all over my house. I never read them; they are so badly spelt as a rule.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Wrong again, Prince; the Nihilists leave me alone for some reason or other.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Aside.*] Ah! true. I forgot. Indifference is the revenge the world takes on mediocrities.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

I am bored with life,[8] Prince. Since the opera season ended I have been a perpetual martyr to ennui.

PRINCE PAUL

The maladie du siècle! You want a new excitement, Prince. Let me see—you have been married twice already; suppose you try—falling in love, for once.

BARON RAFF

Prince, I have been thinking a good deal lately—

PRINCE PAUL

[*Interrupting.*] You surprise me very much, Baron.

BARON RAFF

I cannot understand your nature.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Smiling.*] If my nature had been made to suit your comprehension rather than my own requirements, I am afraid I would have made a very poor figure in the world.

COUNT R.

There seems to be nothing in life about which you would not jest.

PRINCE PAUL

Ah! my dear Count, life is much too important a thing ever to talk seriously about it.

CZAREVITCH

[*Coming back from the window.*] I don't think Prince Paul's nature is such a mystery. He would stab his best friend for the sake of writing an epigram on his tombstone, or experiencing a new sensation.

PRINCE PAUL

Parbleu! I would sooner lose my best friend than my worst enemy. To have friends, you

know, one need only be good-natured; but when a man has no enemy left there must be something mean about him.

CZAREVITCH

[*Bitterly.*] If to have enemies is a measure of greatness, then you must be a Colossus, indeed, Prince.

PRINCE PAUL

Yes, I know I'm the most hated man in Russia, except your father, [9] except your father, of course,[9] Prince. He doesn't seem to like it much, by the way, but I do, I assure you. [*Bitterly.*] I love to drive through the streets and see how the canaille scowl at me from every corner. It makes me feel I am a power in Russia; one man against a hundred millions! Besides, I have no ambition to be a popular hero, to be crowned with laurels one year and pelted with stones the next; I prefer dying peaceably in my own bed.

CZAREVITCH

And after death?

PRINCE PAUL

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*] Heaven is a despotism. I shall be at home there.

CZAREVITCH

Do you never think of the people and their rights?

PRINCE PAUL

The people and their rights bore me. I am sick of both. In these modern days to be vulgar, illiterate, common and vicious, seems to give a man a marvellous infinity of rights that his honest fathers never dreamed of. Believe me, Prince, in good democracy every man should be an aristocrat; but these people in Russia who seek to thrust us out are no better than the animals in one's preserves, and made to be shot at, most of them.

CZAREVITCH

[*Excitedly.*] If they are[10] common, illiterate, vulgar, no better than the beasts of the field, who made them so?

[*Enter Aide-de-Camp.*]

AIDE-DE-CAMP

His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor! [*Prince Paul looks at the Czarevitch, and smiles.*]

[*Enter the Czar, surrounded by his guard.*]

CZAREVITCH

[*Rushing forward to meet him.*] Sire!

CZAR

[*Nervous and frightened.*] Don't come too near me, boy! Don't come too near me, I say! There is always something about an heir to a crown unwholesome to his father. Who is that man over there? I don't know him. What is he doing? Is he a conspirator? Have you searched him? Give him till to-morrow to confess, then hang him!—hang him!

PRINCE PAUL

Sire, you are anticipating history. This is Count Petouchof, your new ambassador to Berlin. He is come to kiss hands on his appointment.

CZAR

To kiss my hand? There is some plot in it.

He wants to poison me. There, kiss my son's hand! it will do quite as well.

[*Prince Paul signs to Prince Petouchof to leave the room. Exit Petouchof and the guards. Czar sinks down into his chair. The courtiers remain silent.*]

PRINCE PAUL

[*Approaching.*] Sire! will your Majesty—

CZAR

What do you startle me like that for? No, I won't. [*Watches the courtiers nervously.*] Why are you clattering your sword, sir? [*To Count Rouvaloff.*] Take it off, I shall have no man wear a sword in my presence [*looking at Czarevitch*], least of all my son. [*To Prince Paul.*] You are not angry with me, Prince? You won't desert me, will you? Say you won't desert me. What do you want? You can have anything—anything.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Bowing very low.*] Sire! 'tis enough for me to have your confidence. [*Aside.*] I was afraid he was going to revenge himself, and give me another decoration.

CZAR

[*Returning to his chair.*] Well, gentlemen.

MARQ. DE POIV.

Sire, I have the honour to present to you a loyal address from your subjects in the Province of Archangel, expressing their horror at the last attempt on your Majesty's life.

PRINCE PAUL

The last attempt but two, you ought to have said, Marquis. Don't you see it is dated three weeks back?

CZAR

They are good people in the Province of Archangel—honest, loyal people. They love me very much—simple, loyal people; give them a new saint, it costs nothing. Well, Alexis [*turning to the Czarevitch*]—how many traitors were hung this morning?

CZAREVITCH

There were three men strangled, Sire.

CZAR

There should have been three[11] thousand. I would to God that this people had but one neck

that I might strangle them with one noose! Did they tell anything? whom did they implicate? what did they confess?

CZAREVITCH

Nothing, Sire.

CZAR

They should have been tortured then; why weren't they tortured? Must I always be fighting in the dark? Am I never to know from what root these traitors spring?

CZAREVITCH

What root should there be of discontent among the people but tyranny and injustice amongst their rulers?

CZAR

What did you say, boy? tyranny! tyranny! Am I a tyrant? I'm not. I love the people. I'm their father. I'm called so in every official proclamation. Have a care, boy; have a care. You don't seem to be cured yet of your foolish tongue. [*Goes over to Prince Paul and puts his hand on his shoulder.*] Prince Paul, tell me

were there many people there this morning to see the Nihilists hung?

PRINCE PAUL

Hanging is of course a good deal less of a novelty in Russia now, Sire, than it was three or four years ago; and you know how easily the people get tired even of their best amusements. But the square and the tops of the houses were really quite crowded, were they not, Prince? [*To the Czarevitch who takes no notice.*]

CZAR

That's right; all loyal citizens should be there. It shows them what to look forward to. Did you arrest any one in the crowd?

PRINCE PAUL

Yes, Sire, a woman for cursing your name. [*The Czarevitch starts anxiously.*] She was the mother of the two criminals.

CZAR

[*Looking at Czarevitch.*] She should have blessed me for having rid her of her children. Send her to prison.

CZAREVITCH

The prisons of Russia are too full already, Sire. There is no room in them for any more victims.

CZAR

They don't die fast enough, then. You should put more of them into one cell at once. You don't keep them long enough in the mines. If you do they're sure to die; but you're all too merciful. I'm too merciful myself. Send her to Siberia.[12] She is sure to die on the way. [*Enter an Aide-de-Camp.*] Who's that? Who's that?

AIDE-DE-CAMP

A letter for his Imperial Majesty.

CZAR

[*To Prince Paul.*] I won't open it. There may be something in it.

PRINCE PAUL

It would be a very disappointing letter, Sire, if there wasn't. [*Takes letter himself, and reads it.*]

PRINCE PETROVITCH

[*To Count Rouvaloff.*] It must be some sad news. I know that smile too well.

PRINCE PAUL

From the Chief of Police at Archangel, Sire. "The Governor of the province was shot this morning by a woman as he was entering the courtyard of his own house. The assassin has been seized."

CZAR

I never trusted the people of Archangel. It's a nest of Nihilists and conspirators. Take away their saints; they don't deserve them.

PRINCE PAUL

Your highness would punish them more severely by giving them an extra one. Three governors shot in two months. [*Smiles to himself.*] Sire, permit me to recommend your loyal subject, the Marquis de Poivrard, as the new governor of your Province of Archangel.

MARQ. DE POIV.

[*Hurriedly.*] Sire, I am unfit for this post.

PRINCE PAUL

Marquis, you are too modest. Believe me, there is no man in Russia I would sooner see Governor of Archangel than yourself. [*Whispers to Czar.*]

CZAR

Quite right, Prince Paul; you are always right. See that the Marquis's letters are made out at once.

PRINCE PAUL

He can start to-night, Sire. I shall really miss you very much, Marquis. I always liked your taste in wines and wives extremely.

MARQ. DE POIV.

[*To the Czar.*] Start to-night, Sire? [*Prince Paul whispers to the Czar.*]

CZAR

Yes, Marquis, to-night; it is better to go at once.

PRINCE PAUL

I shall see that Madame la Marquise is not too lonely while you are away; so you need not be alarmed for her.

COUNT R.

[*To Prince Petrovitch.*] I should be more alarmed for myself.

CZAR

The Governor of Archangel shot in his own courtyard by a woman! I'm not safe here. I'm not safe anywhere, with that she-devil of the revolution, Vera Sabouroff, here in Moscow. Prince Paul, is that woman still here?

PRINCE PAUL

They tell me she was at the Grand Duke's ball last night. I can hardly believe that; but she certainly had intended to leave for Novgorod to-day, Sire. The police were watching every train for her; but, for some reason or other, she did not go. Some traitor must have warned her. But I shall catch her yet. A chase after a beautiful woman is always exciting.

CZAR

You must hunt her down with bloodhounds, and when she is taken I shall hew her limb from limb. I shall stretch her on the rack till her pale white body is twisted and curled like paper in the fire.

PRINCE PAUL

Oh, we shall have another hunt immediately for her, Sire! Prince Alexis will assist us, I am sure.

CZAREVITCH

You never require any assistance to ruin a woman, Prince Paul.

CZAR

Vera, the Nihilist, in Moscow! O God,[13] were it not better to die at once the dog's death they plot for me than to live as I live now! Never to sleep, or, if I do, to dream such horrid dreams that Hell itself were peace when matched with them. To trust none but those I have bought, to buy none worth trusting! To see a traitor in every smile, poison in every dish, a dagger in every hand! To lie awake at night, listening from hour to hour for the stealthy creeping of the murderer, for the laying of the damned mine! You are all spies! you are all spies! You worst of all—you, my own son! Which of you is it who hides these bloody proclamations under my own pillow, or at the table where I sit? Which of ye all is the Judas who betrays me?

O God! O God! methinks there was a time once, in our war with England, when nothing could make me afraid. [*This with more calm and pathos.*] I have ridden into the crimson heart of war, and borne back an eagle which those wild islanders had taken from us. Men said I was brave then. My father gave me the Iron Cross of valour. Oh, could he see me now with this coward's livery ever in my cheek! [*Sinks into his chair.*] I never knew any love when I was a boy. I was ruled by terror myself, how else should I rule now? [*Starts up.*] But I will have revenge; I will have revenge. For every hour I have lain awake at night, waiting for the noose or the dagger, they shall pass years in Siberia, centuries in the mines! Ay! I shall have revenge.

CZAREVITCH

Father! have mercy on the people. Give them what they ask.

PRINCE PAUL

And begin, Sire, with your own head; they have a particular liking for that.

CZAR

The people! the people! A tiger which I have let loose upon myself; but I will fight with it to the death. [14] I am done with half measures.[14] I shall crush these Nihilists at a blow. There shall not be a man of them, ay, or a woman either, left alive in Russia. [15] Am I Emperor for [15] nothing, that a woman should hold me at bay? Vera Sabouroff shall be in my power, I swear it, before a week is ended, [16] though I burn my whole city to find her.[16] She shall be flogged by the knout, stifled in the fortress, strangled in the square!

CZAREVITCH

O God!

CZAR

For two years her hands have been clutching at my throat; for two years she has made my life a hell; but I shall have revenge. Martial law, Prince, martial law over the whole Empire; that will give me revenge. A good measure, Prince, eh? a good measure.

PRINCE PAUL

And an economical one too, Sire. It would

carry off your surplus population in six months; and save you many expenses in courts of justice; they will not be needed now.

CZAR

Quite right. There are too many people in Russia, too much money spent on them, too much money in courts of justice. I'll shut them up.

CZAREVITCH

Sire, reflect before—

CZAR

When can you have the proclamations ready, Prince Paul?

PRINCE PAUL

They have been printed for the last six months, Sire. I knew you would need them.

CZAR

That's good! That's very good! Let us begin at once. Ah, Prince, if every king in Europe had a minister like you—

CZAREVITCH

There would be less kings in Europe than there are.

CZAR

[*In frightened whisper, to Prince Paul.*] What does he mean? Do you trust him? His prison hasn't cured him yet? Shall I banish him? Shall I [*whispers*] . . . ? The Emperor Paul did it. The Empress Catherine there[17] [*points to picture on the wall*] did it. Why shouldn't I?

PRINCE PAUL

Your Majesty, there is no need for alarm. The Prince is a very ingenuous young man. He pretends to be devoted to the people, and lives in a palace; preaches socialism, and draws a salary that would support a province. He'll find out one day that the best cure for Republicanism is the Imperial crown, and will cut up the "bonnet rouge" of Democracy to make decorations for his Prime Minister.

CZAR

You are right. If he really loved the people, he could not be my son.

PRINCE PAUL

If he lived with the people for a fortnight, their bad dinners would soon cure him of his democracy. Shall we begin, Sire?

CZAR

At once. Read the proclamation. Gentlemen, be seated. Alexis, Alexis, I say, come and hear it! It will be good practice for you; you will be doing it yourself some day.

CZAREVITCH

I have heard too much of it already. [*Takes his seat at the table. Count Rouvaloff whispers to him.*]

CZAR

What are you whispering about there, Count Rouvaloff?

COUNT R.

I was giving his Royal Highness some good advice, your Majesty.

PRINCE PAUL

Count Rouvaloff is the typical spendthrift, Sire; he is always giving away what he needs

most. [*Lays papers before the Czar.*] I think, Sire, you will approve of this:—"Love of the people," "Father of his people," "Martial law," and the usual allusions to Providence in the last line. All it requires now is your Imperial Majesty's signature.

CZAREVITCH

Sire!

PRINCE PAUL

[*Hurriedly.*] I promise your Majesty to crush every Nihilist in Russia in six months if you sign this proclamation; every Nihilist in Russia.

CZAR

Say that again! To crush every Nihilist in Russia; to crush this woman, their leader, who makes war upon me in my own city. Prince Paul Maraloffski, I create you Marechale of the whole Russian Empire to help you to carry out martial law.

CZAR

Give me the proclamation. I will sign it at once.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Points on paper.*] Here, Sire.

CZAREVITCH

[*Starts up and puts his hands on the paper.*] Stay! I tell you, stay! The priests have taken heaven from the people, and you would take the earth away too.

PRINCE PAUL

We have no time, Prince, now. This boy will ruin everything. The pen, Sire.

CZAREVITCH

What! is it so small a thing to strangle a nation, to murder a kingdom, to wreck an empire? Who are we who dare lay this ban of terror on a people? Have we less vices than they have, that we bring them to the bar of judgment before us?

PRINCE PAUL

What a Communist the Prince is! He would have an equal distribution of sin as well as of property.

CZAREVITCH

Warmed by the same sun, nurtured by the same air, fashioned of flesh and blood like to our own, wherein are they different to us, save that they starve while we surfeit, that they toil while we idle, that they sicken while we poison, that they die while we strangle?

CZAR

How dare—?

CZAREVITCH

I dare all for the people; but you would rob them of common rights of common men.

CZAR

The people have no rights.

CZAREVITCH

Then they have great wrongs. Father, they have won your battles for you; from the pine forests of the Baltic to the palms of India they have ridden on victory's mighty wings in search of your glory! Boy as I am in years, I have seen wave after wave of living men sweep up the heights of battle to their death; aye, and snatch perilous conquest from the scales of war

when the bloody crescent seemed to shake above our eagles.

CZAR

[*Somewhat moved.*] Those men are dead. What have I to do with them?

CZAREVITCH

Nothing! The dead are safe; you[18] cannot harm them now. They sleep their last long sleep. Some in Turkish waters, others by the windswept heights of Norway and the Dane! But these, the living, our brothers, what have you done for them? They asked you for bread, you gave them a stone. They sought for freedom, you scourged them with scorpions. You have sown the seeds of this revolution yourself!—

PRINCE PAUL

And are we not cutting down the harvest?

CZAREVITCH

Oh, my brothers! better far that ye had died in the iron hail and screaming shell of battle than to come back to such a doom as[19] this! The beasts of the forests have their lairs, and

the wild beasts their caverns, but the people of Russia, conquerors of the world, have not where to lay their heads.

PRINCE PAUL

They have the headsman's block.

CZAREVITCH

The headsman's block! Aye! you have killed their souls at your pleasure, you would kill their bodies now.

CZAR

Insolent boy! Have you forgotten who is Emperor of Russia?

CZAREVITCH

No! The people reign now, by the grace of God.[20] You should have been their shepherd; you have fled away like the hireling, and let the wolves in upon them.

CZAR

Take him away! Take him away, Prince Paul!

CZAREVITCH

God hath given this people tongues to speak

with; you would cut them out that they may be dumb in their agony, silent in their torture! But God hath given them hands to smite with, and they shall smite! Ay! from the sick and labouring womb of this unhappy land some revolution, like a bloody child, shall [21] rise up and slay you.

CZAR

[*Leaping up.*] Devil! Assassin! Why do you beard me thus to my face?

CZAREVITCH

Because I [22] am a Nihilist! [*The ministers start to their feet; there is a dead silence for a few minutes.*]

CZAR

A Nihilist! a Nihilist! Scorpion whom I have nurtured, traitor whom I have fondled, is this your bloody secret? Prince Paul Maraloffski, Marechale of the Russian Empire, arrest the Czarevitch!

MINISTERS

Arrest the Czarevitch!

CZAR

A Nihilist! If you have sown with them, you shall reap with them! If you have talked with them, you shall rot with them! If you have lived with them, with them you shall die!

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Die!

CZAR

A plague on all sons, I say! There should be no more marriages in Russia when one can breed such vipers as you are! Arrest the Czarevitch, I say!

PRINCE PAUL

Czarevitch! by order of the Emperor, I demand your sword. [*Czarevitch gives up sword; Prince Paul places it on the table.*] Foolish boy! you are not made for a conspirator; you have not learned to hold your tongue. Heroics are out of place in a palace.

CZAR

[*Sinks into his chair with his eyes fixed on the Czarevitch.*] O God!

CZAREVITCH

If I am to die for the people, I am ready; one Nihilist more or less in Russia, what does that matter?

PRINCE PAUL

[*Aside.*] A good deal I should say to the one Nihilist.

[23] CZAREVITCH

The mighty brotherhood to which I belong has a thousand such as I am, ten thousand better still! [*The Czar starts in his seat.*] The star of freedom has risen already, and far off I hear the mighty wave democracy break on these cursed shores.[23]

PRINCE PAUL

[*To Prince Petrovitch.*] In that case you and I had better learn how to swim.

CZAREVITCH

Father, Emperor, Imperial Master, I plead not for my own life, but for the lives of my brothers, the people.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Bitterly.*] Your brothers, the people, Prince, are not content with their own lives, they always want to take their neighbour's too.

CZAR

[*Standing up.*] I am sick of being afraid. I have done with terror now. From this day I proclaim war against the people—war to their annihilation. As they have dealt with me, so shall I deal with them. I shall grind them to powder, and strew their dust upon the air. There shall be a spy in every man's house, a traitor on every hearth, a hangman in every village, a gibbet in every square. Plague, leprosy, or fever shall be less deadly than my wrath; I will make every frontier a grave-yard, every province a lazar-house, and cure the sick by the sword. I shall have peace in Russia, though it be the peace of the dead. Who said I was a coward? Who said I was afraid? See, thus shall I crush this people beneath my feet? [*Takes up sword of Czarevitch off table and tramples on it.*]

CZAREVITCH

Father, beware, the sword you tread on may

turn and wound you. The people suffer long, but vengeance comes at last, vengeance with red hands and bloody purpose.

PRINCE PAUL

Bah! the people are bad shots; they always miss one.

CZAREVITCH

There are times when the people are instruments of God.

CZAR

Ay! and when kings are God's scourges for the people. Oh, my own son, in my own house! My own flesh and blood against me! Take him away! Take him away! Bring in my guards. [*Enter the Imperial Guard. Czar points to Czarevitch, who stands alone at the side of the stage.*] To the blackest prison in Moscow! Let me never see his face again. [*Czarevitch is being led out.*] No, no, leave him! I don't trust guards. They are all Nihilists! They would let him escape and he would kill me, kill me! No, I'll bring him to prison myself, you and I [*to Prince Paul*]. I trust you, you have no mercy. I shall have no mercy. Oh, my own

son against me! How hot it is! The air stifles me! I feel as if I were going to faint, as if something were at my throat. Open the windows, I say! Out of my sight! Out of my sight! I can't bear his eyes. Wait, wait for me. [*Throws window open and goes out on balcony.*]

PRINCE PAUL

[*Looking at his watch.*] The dinner is sure to be spoiled. How annoying politics are and eldest sons!

VOICE

[*Outside, in the street.*] God save the people! [*Czar is shot, and staggers back into the room.*]

CZAREVITCH

[*Breaking from the guards, and rushing over.*] Father!

CZAR

Murderer! Murderer! You did it! Murderer! [*Dies.*]

ACT-DROP.

THIRD ACT.

Same scene and business as Act I. Man in yellow dress, with drawn sword, at the door.

Password outside: Væ tyrannis.

Answer: Væ victis [*repeated three times*].

[*Enter Conspirators, who form a semicircle, masked and cloaked.*]

PRESIDENT

What hour is it?

FIRST CONSPIRATOR

The hour to strike.

PRESIDENT

What day?

SECOND CONSPIRATOR

The day of Marat.[1]

PRESIDENT

In what month?

THIRD CONSPIRATOR

The month of liberty.

PRESIDENT

What is our duty?

FOURTH CONSPIRATOR

To obey.

PRESIDENT

Our creed?

FIFTH CONSPIRATOR

Parbleu, Mons. le President, I never knew you had one.

CONSPIRATORS

A spy! A spy! Unmask! Unmask! A spy!

PRESIDENT

[2] Let the doors be shut. There are others but Nihilists present.[2]

CONSPIRATORS

Unmask! Unmask! [3] Kill him! kill him![3] [*Masked Conspirator unmasks.*] Prince Paul!

VERA

Devil! Who lured you into the lion's den!

CONSPIRATORS

Kill him! kill him![4]

PRINCE PAUL

En vérité, Messieurs, you are not over-hospitable in your welcome!

VERA

Welcome! What welcome should we give you but the dagger or the noose?

PRINCE PAUL

I had no idea, really, that the Nihilists were so exclusive. Let me assure you that if I had not always had an *entrée* to the very best society, and the very worst conspirators, I could never have been Prime Minister in Russia.

VERA

The tiger cannot change its nature, nor the snake lose its venom; but are you turned a lover of the people?

PRINCE PAUL

Mon Dieu, non, Mademoiselle! I would much

sooner talk scandal in a drawing-room than treason in a cellar. Besides, I hate the common mob, who smell of garlic, smoke bad tobacco, get up early, and dine off one dish.

PRESIDENT

What have you to gain, then, by a revolution?

PRINCE PAUL

Mon ami, I have nothing left to lose. That scatter-brained boy, this new Czar, has banished me.

VERA

To Siberia?

PRINCE PAUL

No, to Paris. He has confiscated my estates, robbed me of my office and my cook. I have nothing left but my decorations. I am here for revenge.[5]

PRESIDENT

Then you have a right to be one of us. [5] We also meet daily for revenge.[5]

PRINCE PAUL

You want money, of course. No one ever

joins a conspiracy who has any. Here. [*Throws money on table.*] You have so many spies that I should think you want information. Well, you will find me the best informed man in Russia on the abuses of our Government. I made them nearly all myself.

VERA

President, I don't trust this man. He has done us too much harm in Russia to let him go in safety.

PRINCE PAUL

Believe me, Mademoiselle, you are wrong; I will be a most valuable addition to your circle; as for you, gentlemen, if I had not thought that you would be useful to me I shouldn't have risked my neck among you, or dined an hour earlier than usual so as to be in time.

PRESIDENT

Ay, if he had wanted to spy on us, Vera, he wouldn't have come himself.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Aside.*] No; I should have sent my best friend.

PRESIDENT

Besides, Vera, he is just the man to give us the information we want about some business we have in hand to-night.

VERA

Be it so if you wish it.

PRESIDENT

Brothers, is it your will that Prince Paul Maraloffski be admitted, and take the oath of the Nihilist?

CONSPIRATORS

It is! it is!

PRESIDENT

[*Holding out dagger and a paper.*] Prince Paul, the dagger or the oath?

PRINCE PAUL

[*Smiles sardonically.*] I would sooner annihilate than be annihilated. [*Takes paper.*]

PRESIDENT

Remember: [6] Betray us, and as long as the earth holds poison or steel, as long as men can

strike or woman betray, you shall not escape vengeance.[6] The Nihilists never forget their friends, or forgive their enemies.

PRINCE PAUL

Really? I did not think you were so civilized.

VERA

[*Pacing up and down.*] Why is he not here? He will not keep the crown. I know him well.

PRESIDENT

Sign. [*Prince Paul signs.*] You said you thought we had no creed. You were wrong. Read it!

VERA

This is a dangerous thing, President. What can we do with this man?

PRESIDENT

We can use him.

VERA

And afterwards?

PRESIDENT

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*] Strangle him.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Reading.*] "The rights of humanity!" In the old times men carried out their rights for themselves as they lived, but nowadays every baby seems born with a social manifesto in its mouth much bigger than itself.[7] "Nature is not a temple, but a workshop: we demand the right to labour." Ah, I shall surrender my own rights in that respect.

VERA

[*Pacing up and down behind.*] Oh, will he never come? will he never come?

PRINCE PAUL

"The family as subversive of true socialistic and communal unity is to be annihilated." Yes, President, I agree completely with Article 5. A family is a terrible incumbrance, especially when one is not married. [*Three knocks at the door.*]

VERA

Alexis at last!
Password: Væ tyrannis!
Answer: Væ victis!
[*Enter Michael Stroganoff.*]

PRESIDENT [8]

Michael, the regicide! Brothers, let us do honour to a man who has killed a king.

[9] VERA

[*Aside.*] Oh, he will come yet.[9]

PRESIDENT

Michael, you have saved Russia.

MICHAEL

Ay, Russia was free for a moment [10] when the tyrant fell, but the sun of liberty has set again like that false dawn which cheats our eyes in autumn.

PRESIDENT

The dread night of tyranny is not yet past for Russia.

MICHAEL

[*Clutching his knife.*] [10] One more blow, and the end is come indeed.

VERA

[*Aside.*] One more blow! What does he mean? Oh, impossible! but why is he not with us? Alexis! Alexis! why are you not here?

PRESIDENT

But how did you escape, Michael? They said you had been seized.

MICHAEL

I was dressed in the uniform of the Imperial Guard. The Colonel on duty was a brother, and gave me the password. I drove through the troops in safety with it, and, thanks to my good horse, reached the walls before the gates were closed.

PRESIDENT

What a chance his coming out on the balcony was!

MICHAEL

A chance? There is no such thing as chance. It was God's finger led him there.

PRESIDENT

And where have you been these three days?

MICHAEL

Hiding in the house of the priest Nicholas at the cross-roads.

PRESIDENT

Nicholas is an honest man.

MICHAEL

Ay, honest enough for a priest. I am here now for vengeance on a traitor!

VERA

[*Aside.*] O God, will he never come? Alexis! why are you not here? You cannot have turned traitor!

MICHAEL

[*Seeing Prince Paul.*] Prince Paul Maraloffski here! By St. George, a lucky capture! This must have been Vera's doing. She is the only one who could have lured that serpent into the trap.

PRESIDENT

Prince Paul has just taken the oath.

VERA

Alexis, the Czar, has banished him from Russia.

MICHAEL

Bah! A blind to cheat us. We will keep

Prince Paul here, [11] and find some office for him in our reign of terror.[11] He is well accustomed by this time to bloody work.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Approaching Michael.*] That was a long shot of yours, mon camarade.

MICHAEL

I have had a good deal of practice shooting, since I have been a boy, off your Highness's wild boars.

PRINCE PAUL

Are my gamekeepers like moles, then, always asleep?

MICHAEL

No, Prince. I am one of them; but, like you, I am fond of robbing what I am put to watch.

PRESIDENT

This must be a new atmosphere for you, Prince Paul. We speak the truth to one another here.

PRINCE PAUL

How misleading you must find it. You have

an odd medley here, President—a little rococo, I am afraid.

PRESIDENT

You recognise a good many friends, I dare say?

PRINCE PAUL

Yes, there is always more brass than brains in an aristocracy.

PRESIDENT

But you are here yourself?

PRINCE PAUL

I? As I cannot be Prime Minister, I must be a Nihilist. There is no alternative.

VERA

O God, will he never come? The hand is on the stroke of the hour. Will he never come?

MICHAEL

[*Aside.*] President, you know what we have to do? 'Tis but a sorry hunter who leaves the wolf cub alive to avenge his father. How are we to get at this boy? It must be to-night. To-morrow he will be throwing some sop of reform

to the people, and it will be too late for a Republic.

PRINCE PAUL

You are quite right. Good kings are the enemies of Democracy, and when he has begun by banishing me you may be sure he intends to be a patriot.

MICHAEL

I am sick of patriot kings; [12] what Russia needs is a Republic.[12]

PRINCE PAUL

Messieurs, I have brought you two documents which I think will interest you—the proclamation this young Czar intends publishing to-morrow, and a plan of the Winter Palace, where he sleeps to-night. [*Hands paper.*]

VERA

[13] I dare not ask them what they are plotting about.[13] Oh, why is Alexis not here?

PRESIDENT

Prince, this is most valuable information. Michael, you were right. If it is not to-night it will be too late. Read that.

MICHAEL

Ah! A loaf of bread flung to a starving nation. [14] A lie to cheat the people.[14] [*Tears it up.*] It must be to-night. I do not believe in him. Would he have kept his crown had he loved the people? But how are we to get at him?

PRINCE PAUL

The key of the private door in the street. [*Hands key.*]

PRESIDENT

Prince, we are in your debt.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Smiling.*] The normal condition of the Nihilists.

MICHAEL

Ay, but we are paying our debts off with interest now. Two Emperors in one week. That will make the balance straight. We would have thrown in a Prime Minister if you had not come.

PRINCE PAUL

Ah, I am sorry you told me. It robs my visit of all its picturesqueness and adventure. I thought I was perilling my head by coming here, and you tell me I have saved it. One is sure to be disappointed if one tries to get romance out of modern life.

MICHAEL

It is not so romantic a thing to lose one's head, Prince Paul.

PRINCE PAUL

No, but it must often be very dull to keep it. Don't you find that sometimes? [*Clock strikes six.*]

VERA

[*Sinking into a seat.*] Oh, it is past the hour! It is past the hour!

MICHAEL

[*To President.*] Remember to-morrow will be too late.

PRESIDENT

Brothers, it is full time. Which of us is absent?

CONSPIRATORS

Alexis! Alexis!

PRESIDENT

Michael, read Rule 7.

MICHAEL

"When any brother shall have disobeyed a summons to be present, the President shall enquire if there is anything alleged against him."

PRESIDENT

Is there anything against our brother Alexis?

CONSPIRATOR

He wears a crown! He wears a crown!

PRESIDENT

Michael, read Article 7 of the Code of Revolution.

MICHAEL

"Between the Nihilists and all men who wear crowns above their fellows, there is war to the death."

PRESIDENT

Brothers, what say you? Is Alexis, the Czar, guilty or not?

OMNES

He is guilty!

PRESIDENT

What shall the penalty be?

OMNES

Death!

PRESIDENT

Let the lots be prepared; it shall be to-night.

PRINCE PAUL

Ah, this is really interesting! I was getting afraid conspiracies were as dull as courts are.

PROFESSOR MARFA

My forte is more in writing pamphlets than in taking shots. Still a regicide has always a place in history.

MICHAEL

If your pistol is as harmless as your pen, this young tyrant will have a long life.

PRINCE PAUL

You ought to remember, too, Professor, that if you were seized, as you probably would be,

and hung, as you certainly would be, there would be nobody left to read your own articles.

PRESIDENT

Brothers, are you ready?

VERA

[*Starting up.*] Not yet! Not yet! I have a word to say.

MICHAEL

[*Aside.*] [15] Plague take her! I knew it would come to this.[15]

VERA

This boy has been our brother. Night after night he has perilled his own life to come here. [16] Night after night, when every street was filled with spies, every house with traitors.[16] Delicately nurtured like a king's son, he has dwelt among us.

PRESIDENT

Ay! under a false name. [17] He lied to us at the beginning. He lies to us now at the end.[17]

VERA

I swear he is true. There is not a man here

who does not owe him his life a thousand times. When the bloodhounds were on us that night, who saved us [18] from arrest, torture, flogging, death,[18] but he ye seek to kill?—

MICHAEL

To kill all tyrants is our mission!

VERA

He is no tyrant. I know him well! He loves the people.

PRESIDENT

We know him too; he is a traitor.

VERA

A traitor! Three days ago he could have betrayed every man of you here, [19] and the gibbet would have been your doom.[19] He gave you all your lives once. Give him a little time—a week, a month, a few days; but not now!—O God,[20] not now!

CONSPIRATORS

[*Brandishing daggers.*] To-night! to-night! to-night!

VERA

Peace, you gorged adders; peace!

MICHAEL

What, are we not here to annihilate? shall we not keep our oath?

VERA

Your oath! your oath! [21] Greedy that you are of gain, every man's hand lusting for his neighbour's pelf, every heart set on pillage and rapine; [21] who, of ye all, if the crown were set on his head, would give an empire up for the mob to scramble for? The people are not yet fit for a Republic in Russia.

PRESIDENT

Every nation is fit for a Republic.

MICHAEL

The man is a tyrant.

VERA

A tyrant! Hath he not dismissed his evil counsellors. That ill-omened raven of his father's life hath had his wings clipped and his claws pared, and comes to us croaking for re-

venge. Oh, have mercy on him![22] Give him a week to live?

PRESIDENT

Vera pleading for a king!

VERA

[*Proudly.*] I plead not for a king, but for a brother.

MICHAEL

For a traitor to his oath, for a coward who should have flung the purple back to the fools that gave it to him. No, Vera, no. The brood of men is not dead yet, nor the dull earth grown sick of child-bearing. No crowned man in Russia shall pollute God's air by living.

PRESIDENT

You bade us try you once; we have tried you, and you are found wanting.

MICHAEL

Vera, I am not blind; I know your secret. You love this boy, this young prince with his pretty face, his curled hair, his soft white hands. Fool that you are, dupe of a lying tongue, do

you know what he would have done to you, this boy you think loved you? He would have made you his mistress, used your body at his pleasure, thrown you away when he was wearied of you; you, the priestess of liberty, the flame of Revolution, the torch of democracy.

VERA

What he would have done to me matters little. To the people, at least, he will be true. He loves the people—at least, he loves liberty.

PRESIDENT

So he would play the citizen-king, would he, while we starve? [23] Would flatter us with sweet speeches, would cheat us with promises like his father, would lie to us as his whole race have lied.[23]

MICHAEL

And you whose very name made every despot tremble for his life, you, Vera Sabouroff, you would betray liberty for a lover and the people for a paramour!

CONSPIRATORS

[24] Traitress! Draw the lots; draw the lots![24]

VERA

In thy throat thou liest, Michael! I love him not. He loves me not.

MICHAEL

You love him not? Shall he not die then?

VERA

[*With an effort, clenching her hands.*] Ay, it is right that he should die. He hath broken his oath. [25] There should be no crowned man in Europe. Have I not sworn it? To be strong our new Republic should be drunk with the blood of kings. He hath broken his oath. As the father died so let the son die too.[25] Yet not to-night, not to-night. Russia, that hath borne her centuries of wrong, can wait a week for liberty. Give him a week.

PRESIDENT

We will have none of you! Begone from us to this boy you love.

MICHAEL

Though I find him in your arms I shall kill him.

CONSPIRATORS

To-night! To-night! To-night!

MICHAEL

[*Holding up his hand.*] A moment! I have something to say. [*Approaches Vera; speaks very slowly.*] Vera Sabouroff, have you forgotten your brother? [*Pauses to see effect; Vera starts.*] Have you forgotten that young face, pale with famine; those young limbs twisted with torture; the iron chains they made him walk in? What week of liberty did they give him? What pity did they show him for a day? [*Vera falls in a chair.*] Oh! you could talk glibly enough then of vengeance, glibly enough of liberty. When you said you would come to Moscow, your old father caught you by the knees and begged you not to leave him childless and alone.[26] I seem to hear his cries still ringing in my ears, but you were as deaf to him as the rocks on the roadside; as chill and cold as the snow on the hill. You left your father that night, and three weeks after he died of a broken heart. You wrote to me to follow you here. I did so; first because I loved you; but you soon cured me of that; whatever gentle feeling, what-

ever pity, whatever humanity, was in my heart you withered up and destroyed, as the canker worm eats the corn, and the plague kills the child. You bade me cast out love from my breast as a vile thing, you turned my hand to iron and my heart to stone; you told me to live for freedom and for revenge. I have done so; but you, what have you done?

VERA

Let the lots be drawn! [*Conspirators applaud.*]

PRINCE PAUL

[*Aside.*] Ah, the Grand Duke will come to the throne sooner than he expected. He is sure to make a good king under my guidance. He is so cruel to animals, and never keeps his word.

MICHAEL

Now you are yourself at last, Vera.

VERA

[*Standing motionless in the middle.*] The lots, I say, the lots! I am no woman now. My blood seems turned to gall; my heart is as cold as steel is; my hand shall be more deadly. From

the desert and the tomb the voice of my prisoned brother cries aloud, and bids me strike one blow for liberty. The lots, I say, the lots!

PRESIDENT

Are you ready? Michael, you have the right to draw first; you are a Regicide.

VERA

O God, into my hands! Into my hands! [*They draw the lots from a bowl surmounted by a skull.*]

PRESIDENT

Open your lots.

VERA

[*Opening her lot.*] The lot is mine! see the bloody sign upon it! Dmitri, my brother, you shall have your revenge now.

PRESIDENT

Vera Sabouroff, you are chosen to be a regicide. God has been good to you. The dagger or the poison? [*Offers her dagger and vial.*]

VERA

I can trust my hand better with the dagger;

it never fails. [*Takes dagger.*] I shall stab him to the heart, as he has stabbed me. Traitor, to leave us for a riband, a gaud, a bauble, to lie to me every day he came here, to forget us in an hour. [27] Michael was right, he loved me not, nor the people either.[27] Methinks that if I was a mother and bore a man-child I would poison my breast to him, lest he might grow to a traitor or to a king. [*Prince Paul whispers to the President.*]

PRESIDENT

Ay, Prince Paul, that is the best way. Vera, the Czar [28] sleeps to-night in his own room in the north wing of the palace. Here is the key of the private door in the street. The passwords of the guards will be given to you. His own servants will be drugged. You will find him alone.

VERA

It is well. I shall not fail.

PRESIDENT

We will wait outside in the Place St. Isaac, under the window. As the clock strikes twelve

from the tower of St. Nicholas you will give us the sign that the dog is dead.

VERA

And what shall the sign be?

PRESIDENT

You are to throw us out the bloody dagger.

MICHAEL

Dripping with the traitor's life.

PRESIDENT

Else we shall know that you have been seized, and we will burst our way in, drag you from his guards.

MICHAEL

And kill him in the midst of them.

PRESIDENT

Michael, you will head us?

MICHAEL

Ay, I shall head you. See that your hand fails not, Vera Sabouroff.

[29] VERA

Fool, is it so hard a thing to kill one's enemy?[29]

PRINCE PAUL

[*Aside.*] This is the ninth conspiracy I have been in in Russia. They always end in a "voyage en Siberie" for my friends and a new decoration for myself.

MICHAEL

It is your last conspiracy, Prince.

PRESIDENT

At twelve o'clock, the bloody dagger.

VERA

Ay, red with the blood of that false heart. I shall not forget it. [*Standing in the middle of the stage.*] [30] To strangle whatever nature is in me, neither to love nor to be loved, neither to pity nor to be pitied. Ay! it is an oath, an oath. Methinks the spirit of Charlotte Corday has entered my soul now. I shall carve my name on the world, and be ranked among the great heroines. Ay! the spirit of Charlotte Corday beats in each petty vein, and nerves my woman's hand

to strike, as I have nerved my woman's heart to hate. Though he laugh in his dreams, I shall not falter. Though he sleep peacefully, I shall not miss my blow.[30] Be glad, my brother, in your stifled cell; be glad and laugh to-night. To-night this new-fledged Czar shall post with bloody feet to Hell, and greet his father there![31] This Czar! O traitor, liar, false to his oath, false to me! To play the patriot amongst us, and now to wear a crown; to sell us, like Judas, for thirty silver pieces, to betray us with a kiss![31] [*With more passion.*] O Liberty, O mighty mother of eternal time, thy robe is purple with the blood of those who have died for thee! Thy throne is the Calvary of the people, thy crown the crown of thorns. O crucified mother, the despot has driven a nail through thy right hand, and the tyrant through thy left! Thy feet are pierced with their iron. When thou wert athirst thou calledst on the priests for water, and they gave thee bitter drink. They thrust a sword into thy side. They mocked thee in thine agony of age on age.[32] Here, on thy altar, O Liberty, do I dedicate myself to thy service; do with me as thou wilt![32] [*Brandish-*

ing dagger.] The end has come now, and by thy sacred wounds, O crucified mother, O Liberty, I swear that Russia shall be saved!

ACT-DROP.

FOURTH ACT.

SCENE—*Antechamber of the Czar's private room. Large window at the back, with drawn curtains over it.*

Present—PRINCE PETROVITCH, BARON RAFF, MARQUIS DE POIVRARD, COUNT ROUVALOFF.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

He is beginning well, this young Czar.

BARON RAFF

[*Shrugs his shoulders.*] All young Czars do begin well.

COUNT R.

And end badly.

[1] MARQ. DE POIV.

Well, I have no right to complain. He has done me one good service, at any rate.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Cancelled your appointment to Archangel, I suppose?

MARQ. DE POIV.

Yes; my head wouldn't have been safe there for an hour.[1]

[*Enter General Kotemkin.*]

BARON RAFF

Ah! General, any more news of our romantic Emperor?

GEN. KOTEMKIN

You are quite right to call him romantic, Baron; a week ago I found him amusing himself in a garret with a company of strolling players; to-day his whim is all the convicts in Siberia are to be recalled, and political prisoners, as he calls them, amnestied.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Political prisoners! Why, half of them are no better than common murderers!

COUNT R.

And the other half much worse?

BARON RAFF

Oh, you wrong them, surely, Count. Wholesale trade has always been more respectable than retail.

COUNT R.

But he is really too romantic. He objected yesterday to my having the monopoly of the salt tax. He said the people had a right to have cheap salt.

MARQ. DE POIV.

Oh, that's nothing; but he actually disapproved of a State banquet every night because there is a famine in the Southern provinces. [*The young Czar enters unobserved, and overhears the rest.*]

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Quelle bétise! The more starvation there is among the people, the better. It teaches them self-denial, an excellent virtue, Baron, an excellent virtue.

BARON RAFF

I have often heard so; I have often heard so.

GEN. KOTEMKIN

He talked of a Parliament, too, in Russia, and said the people should have deputies to represent them.

BARON RAFF

As if there was not enough brawling in the streets already, but we must give the people a room to do it in. But, Messieurs, the worst is yet to come. He threatens a complete reform in the public service on the ground that the people are too heavily taxed.

MARQ. DE POIV.

He can't be serious there. What is the use of the people except [2] to get money out of? But talking of taxes, my dear Baron, you must really let me have forty thousand roubles to-morrow; my wife says she must have a new diamond bracelet.

COUNT R.

[*Aside to Baron Raff.*] Ah, to match the one Prince Paul gave her last week, I suppose.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

I must have sixty thousand roubles at once,

Baron. My son is overwhelmed with debts of honour which he can't pay.

BARON RAFF

What an excellent son to imitate his father so carefully!

GEN. KOTEMKIN

You are always getting money. I never get a single kopeck I have not got a right to. It's unbearable; it's ridiculous! My nephew is going to be married. I must get his dowry for him.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

My dear General, your nephew must be a perfect Turk. He seems to get married three times a week regularly.

GEN. KOTEMKIN

Well, he wants dowry to console him.

COUNT R.

I am sick of town. I want a house in the country.

MARQ. DE POIV.

I am sick of the country. I want a house in town.

BARON RAFF

Mes amis, I am extremely sorry for you. It is out of the question.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

But my son, Baron?

GEN. KOTEMKIN

But my nephew?

MARQUIS DE P.

But my house in town?

COUNT R.

But my house in the country?

MARQ. DE POIR.

But my wife's diamond bracelet?

BARON RAFF

Gentlemen, impossible! The old *régime* in Russia is dead; the funeral begins to-day.

COUNT R.

Then I shall wait for the resurrection.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Yes, but, *en attendant,* what are we to do?

BARON RAFF

What have we always done in Russia when a Czar suggests reform?—nothing. You forget we are diplomatists. Men of thought should have nothing to do with action. Reforms in Russia are very tragic, but they always end in a farce.

COUNT R.

I wish Prince Paul were here. [3] By the bye, I think this boy is rather ungrateful to him. If that clever old Prince had not proclaimed him Emperor at once without giving him time to think about it, he would have given up his crown, I believe, to the first cobbler he met in the street.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

But do you think, Baron, that Prince Paul is really going? [3]

BARON RAFF

He is exiled.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Yes; but is he going?

BARON RAFF

I am sure of it; at least he told me he had sent two telegrams already to Paris about his dinner.

COUNT R.

Ah! that settles the matter.

CZAR

[*Coming forward.*] Prince Paul better send a third telegram and order [*counting them*] six extra places.

BARON RAFF

The devil!

CZAR

No, Baron, the Czar. Traitors! There would be no bad kings in the world if there were no bad ministers like you. It is men such as you who wreck mighty empires on the rock of their own greatness. Our mother, Russia, hath no need of such unnatural sons. You can make no atonement now; it is too late for that. The grave cannot give back your dead, nor the gibbet your martyrs, but I shall be more merciful to you. I give you your lives! That is the curse

I would lay on you. But if there is a man of you found in Moscow by to-morrow night your heads will be off your shoulders.

BARON RAFF

You remind us wonderfully, Sire, of your Imperial father.

CZAR

I banish you all from Russia. Your estates are confiscated to the people. You may carry your titles with you. Reforms in Russia, Baron, always end in a farce. You will have a good opportunity, Prince Petrovitch, of practising self-denial, that excellent virtue! that excellent virtue! So, Baron, you think a Parliament in Russia would be merely a place for brawling. Well, I will see that the reports of each session are sent to you regularly.

BARON RAFF

Sire, you are adding another horror to exile.

CZAR

But you will have such time for literature now. You forget you are diplomatists. Men of thought should have nothing to do with action.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Sire, we did but jest.

CZAR

Then I banish you for your bad jokes. Bon voyage, Messieurs.[4] If you value your lives you will catch the first train for Paris. [*Exeunt Ministers.*] Russia is well rid of such men as these. They are the jackals that follow in the lion's track. [5] They have no courage themselves, except to pillage and rob.[5] But for these men and for Prince Paul my father would have been a good king, would not have died so horribly as he did die. How strange it is, the most real parts of one's life always seem to be a dream! The council, the fearful law which was to kill the people, the arrest, the cry in the courtyard, the pistol-shot, my father's bloody hands, and then the crown! One can live for years sometimes, without living at all, and then all life comes crowding into a single hour. I had no time to think. Before my father's hideous shriek of death had died in my ears I found this crown on my head, the purple robe around me, and heard myself called a king. I would have given it all up then; it seemed nothing to

me then; but now, can I give it up now? Well, Colonel, well? [*Enter Colonel of the Guard.*]

COLONEL

What password does your Imperial Majesty desire should be given to-night?

CZAR

Password?

COLONEL

[6]For the cordon of[6] guards, Sire, on night duty around the palace.

CZAR

You can dismiss them. I have no need of them. [*Exit Colonel.*] [*Goes to the crown lying on the table.*] What subtle potency lies hidden in this gaudy bauble, the crown,[7] that makes one feel like a god when one wears it? To hold in one's hand this little fiery coloured world, to reach out one's arm to earth's uttermost limit, to girdle the seas with one's hosts; this is to wear a crown! to wear a crown! The meanest serf in Russia who is loved is better crowned than I. How love outweighs the balance! How poor appears the widest empire of

this golden world when matched with love! Pent up in this palace, with spies dogging every step, I have heard nothing of her; I have not seen her once since that fearful hour three days ago, when I found myself suddenly the Czar of this wide waste, Russia. Oh, could I see her for a moment; tell her now the secret of my life I have never dared utter before: tell her why I wear this crown, when I have sworn eternal war against all crowned men! There was a meeting to-night. I received my summons by an unknown hand; but how could I go? I who have broken my oath! who have broken my oath!

[*Enter Page.*]

PAGE

It is after eleven, Sire. Shall I take the first watch in your room to-night?

CZAR

Why should you watch me, boy? The stars are my best sentinels.

PAGE

It was your Imperial father's wish, Sire, never to be left alone while he slept.

CZAR

My father was troubled with bad dreams. Go, get to your bed, boy; it is nigh on midnight, and these late hours will spoil those red cheeks. [*Page tries to kiss his hand.*] Nay, nay; we have played together too often as children for that. Oh, to breathe the same air as her, and not to see her! the light seems to have gone from my life, the sun vanished from my day.

PAGE

Sire,—Alexis,—let me stay with [8] you to-night! There is some danger over you; I feel there is.

CZAR

What should I fear? I have banished all my enemies from Russia. Set the brazier here, by me; it is very cold, and I would sit by it for a time. Go, boy, go; I have much to think about to-night. [*Goes to back of stage, draws aside curtain. View of Moscow by moonlight.*] The snow has fallen heavily since sunset. How white and cold my city looks under this pale moon! And yet, what hot and fiery hearts beat in this icy Russia, for all its frost and snow!

Oh, to see her for a moment; to tell her all; to tell her why I am king! But she does not doubt me; she said she would trust in me. Though I have broken my oath, she will have trust. It is very cold. Where is my cloak? I shall sleep for an hour. Then I have ordered my sledge, and, though I die for it, I shall see Vera to-night. Did I not bid thee go, boy? What! must I play the tyrant so soon? Go, go! I cannot live without seeing her. My horses will be here in an hour; one hour between me and love! How heavy this charcoal fire smells. [*Exit the Page. Lies down on a couch beside brazier.*]

[*Enter Vera in a black cloak.*]

VERA

Asleep! God, thou art good! Who shall deliver him from my hands now? [9] This is he! The democrat who would make himself a king, the republican who hath worn a crown, the traitor who hath lied to us. Michael was right. He loved not the people. He loved me not.[9] [*Bends over him.*] Oh, why should such deadly poison lie in such sweet lips? Was there not gold enough in his hair before, that he should tarnish it with this crown? But my day has

come now; the day of the people, of liberty, has come! Your day, my brother, has come! Though I have strangled whatever nature is in me, I did not think it had been so easy to kill. One blow and it is over, and I can wash my hands in water afterwards, I can wash my hands afterwards. Come, I shall save Russia. I have sworn it. [*Raises dagger to strike.*]

CZAR

[*Starting up, seizes her by both hands.*] Vera, you here! My dream was no dream at all. Why have you left me three days alone, when I most needed you? O God, you think I am a traitor, a liar, a king? I am, for love of you. Vera, it was for you I broke my oath and wear my father's crown. I would lay at your feet this mighty Russia, which you and I have loved so well; would give you this earth as a footstool! set this crown on your head. The people will love us. We will rule them by love, as a father rules his children. There shall be liberty in Russia for every man to think as his heart bids him; liberty for men to speak as they think. I have banished the wolves that preyed on us; I have brought back your brother from

Siberia; I have opened the blackened jaws of the mine. The courier is already on his way; within a week Dmitri and all those with him will be back in their own land. The people shall be free—are free now—and you and I, Emperor and Empress of this mighty realm, will walk among them openly, in love. When they gave me this crown first, I would have flung it back to them, had it not been for you, Vera. O God! It is men's custom in Russia to bring gifts to those they love. I said, I will bring to the woman I love a people, an empire, a world! Vera, it is for you, for you alone, I kept this crown; for you alone I am a king. Oh, I have loved you better than my oath! Why will you not speak to me? You love me not! You love me not! You have come to warn me of some plot against my life. What is life worth to me without you? [*Conspirators murmur outside.*]

VERA

Oh, lost! lost! lost!

CZAR

Nay, you are safe here. It wants five hours still of dawn. To-morrow, I will lead you forth to the whole people—

VERA

To-morrow—!

CZAR

Will crown you with my own hands as Empress in that great cathedral which my fathers built.

VERA

[*Loosens her hands violently from him, and starts up.*] I am a Nihilist! I cannot wear a crown!

CZAR

[*Falls at her feet.*] I am no king now. I am only a boy who has loved you better than his honour, better than his oath. For love of the people I would have been a patriot. For love of you I have been a traitor. Let us go forth together, we will live amongst the common people. I am no king. I will toil for you like the peasant or the serf. Oh, love me a little too! [*Conspirators murmur outside.*]

VERA

[*Clutching dagger.*] To strangle whatever nature is in me, neither to love nor to be loved,

neither to pity nor —— Oh, I am a woman! God help me, I am a woman! O Alexis! I too have broken my oath; I am a traitor. I love. Oh, do not speak, do not speak—[*kisses his lips*] —the first, the last time. [*He clasps her in his arms; they sit on the couch together.*]

CZAR

I could die now.

VERA

What does death do in thy lips? Thy life, thy love are enemies of death. Speak not of death. Not yet, not yet.

CZAR

I know not why death came into my heart. Perchance the cup of life is filled too full of pleasure to endure. This is our wedding night.

VERA

Our wedding night!

CZAR

And if death came himself, methinks that I could kiss his pallid mouth, and suck sweet poison from it.

VERA

Our wedding night! Nay, nay. Death should not sit at the feast. There is no such thing as death.

CZAR

There shall not be for us. [*Conspirators murmur outside.*]

VERA

What is that? Did you not hear something?

CZAR

Only your voice, that fowler's note which lures my heart away like a poor bird upon the limed twig.

VERA

Methought that some one laughed.

CZAR

It was but the wind and rain; the night is full of storm. [*Conspirators murmur outside.*]

VERA

It should be so indeed. Oh, where are your guards? where are your guards?

CZAR

Where should they be but at home? I shall not live pent round by sword and steel. The love of a people is a king's best body-guard.

VERA

The love of a people!

CZAR

Sweet, you are safe here. Nothing can harm you here. O love, I knew you trusted me! You said you would have trust.

VERA

I have had trust. O love, the past seems but some dull grey dream from which our souls have wakened. This is life at last.

CZAR

Ay, life at last.

VERA

Our wedding night! Oh, let me drink my fill of love to-night! Nay, sweet, not yet, not yet. How still it is, and yet methinks the air is full of music. It is some nightingale, who, wearying of the south, has come to sing in this bleak north

to lovers such as we. It is the nightingale. Dost thou not hear it?

CZAR

Oh, sweet, mine ears are clogged to all sweet sounds save thine own voice, and mine eyes blinded to all sights but thee, else had I heard that nightingale, and seen the golden-vestured morning sun itself steal from its sombre east before its time for jealousy that thou art twice as fair.

VERA

Yet would that thou hadst heard the nightingale. Methinks that bird will never sing again.

CZAR

It is no nightingale. 'Tis love himself singing for very ecstasy of joy that thou art changed into his votaress. [*Clock begins striking twelve.*] Oh, listen, sweet, it is the lover's hour. Come, let us stand without, and hear the midnight answered from tower to tower over the wide white town. Our wedding night! What is that? What is that?

[*Loud murmurs of Conspirators in the street.*]

VERA

[*Breaks from him and rushes across the stage.*] The wedding guests are here already! Ay, you shall have your sign! [*Stabs herself.*] You shall have your sign! [*Rushes to the window.*]

CZAR

[*Intercepts her by rushing between her and window, and snatches dagger out of her hand.*] Vera!

VERA

[*Clinging to him.*] Give me back the dagger! Give me back the dagger! There are men in the street who seek your life! Your guards have betrayed you! This bloody dagger is the signal that you are dead. [*Conspirators begin to shout below in the street.*] Oh, there is not a moment to be lost! Throw it out! Throw it out! Nothing can save me now; this dagger is poisoned! I feel death already in my heart.

CZAR

[*Holding dagger out of her reach.*] Death is in my heart too; we shall die together.

VERA

Oh, love! love! love! be merciful to me! The wolves are hot upon you! you must live for liberty, for Russia, for me! Oh, you do not love me! You offered me an empire once! Give me this dagger now! Oh, you are cruel! My life for yours! What does it matter? [*Loud shouts in the street, "Vera! Vera! To the rescue! To the rescue!"*]

CZAR

The bitterness of death is past for me.

VERA

Oh, they are breaking in below! See! The bloody man behind you! [*Czar turns round for an instant.*] Ah! [*Vera snatches dagger and flings it out of window.*]

CONSPIRATORS

[*Below.*] Long live the people!

CZAR

What have you done?

VERA

I have saved Russia. [*Dies.*]

CURTAIN.

CORRECTIONS AND ADDITIONS

MADE BY THE AUTHOR IN HIS ORIGINAL COPY.

The numbers of the "Notes" correspond with the superior figures in the body of the text.

ACT I.

Note 1 Changed to 2 in violet pencil.
2 Lines from 2 to 2 scored out.
3 These lines scored out, and "we will have" added.
4 This word underlined.
5 These lines scored out.
6 These lines scored out, "what news to-night" inserted.
7 Lines scored out.
8 Altered to "He."
9 Lines scored out.
10 Altered to "signal for."
11 Lines scored out.
12 Lines scored out.
13 Altered to "be calm, Michael!"
14 These words underlined.
15 Words underlined.
16 Word underlined.

Note 17 Lines scored out.
18 Words scored out.
19 Lines scored out, "from Berlin" inserted.
20 Word scored through.
21 Altered to "strong."
22 These lines scored through.
23 Scored through.
24 Altered to "martial law scheme."
25 Altered to "To raise the barricades."
26 Crossed out.
27 The word "pause" as a stage direction inserted.
28 Lines crossed out.
29 Scored through.
30 Scored through.
31 Word underlined.
32 Word underlined.
33 Words "Who is there?" inserted.
34 Scored through.
35 Scored through.
36 Scored through.
37 Altered to "He has sold us."
38 Word underlined.

ACT II.

1 Lines scored through.
2 Altered to "you missed."
3 Altered to "profession."
4 Scored through.
5 Word scored through.
6 Insert "for them to go to."
7 Insert "dining."
8 Altered to "bored to death."

Note 9 Scored through.
10 Word underlined.
11 Altered to "a."
12 Lines scored through.
13 "O God!" scored through.
14 Scored through.
15 Lines scored through.
16 Words scored through.
17 Word underlined.
18 Word underlined.
19 Words underlined.
20 Stage direction "a pause" indicated.
21 Altered to "may."
22 Word "I" underlined.
23 This speech cut out.

ACT III.

1 "Marat" underlined.
2 Altered to "VERA. Unmask! a spy!"
3 Scored through.
4 Scored through.
5 Scored through.
6 Lines scored through.
7 Insert "and quite as unintelligible."
8 Alter "PRES." to "VERA."
9 Scored through.
10 These lines struck out.
11 This passage scored through.
12 This is struck out.
13 Scored through.
14 Scored through.
15 This speech cut out.
16 Lines scored through.

Note 17 Lines scored through.
18 Cut out this passage and insert "Alexis" after "but."
19 Lines scored through.
20 Altered to "No! No!"
21 This passage is cut out.
22 Insert "Alexis" in place of "him."
23 Lines scored through.
24 This speech cut out.
25 This passage is scored through.
26 The words "no laugh" are inserted here—possibly as a stage direction.
27 Passage scored through.
28 In place of "the Czar" read "Alexis."
29 Delete this speech.
30 This passage is scored out.
31 This passage is scored out.
32 This passage is scored out.

ACT IV.

1 These three speeches are scored through.
2 Insert "for the politician."
3 All these lines are cut out.
4 Alter to "Gentlemen."
5 Cut out this sentence.
6 Words scored through.
7 Delete "the crown."
8 Substitute "stop near" for "stay with."
9 This passage is cut out.

The Duchess of Padua:
A Tragedy of the XVI Century

This drama was written in 1883, but was acted for the first time by Laurence Barrett at the Broadway Theatre, New York, Monday, January 26, 1891, under the title of "Guido Ferranti."

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

By SIR JOHNSTON FORBES-ROBERTSON

Wilde was at the height of his social popularity when he wrote this, his first play, "The Duchess of Padua." Though at the time he had not arrived as a man of letters, every hostess was only too glad to see him at her table, and he was persona grata wherever he went, with his ready wit and genial good fellowship. He shared rooms in those days with Frank Niles, the artist, in Salisbury Street, Strand, where yet were some chairs and other pieces of furniture with an N on them.

I recall his standing at an elaborate lectern to read the play to me and my brother Norman, but we chaffed him so much just before the reading began, about his pose at the lectern, and his affectation of dress, which was just then beginning to grow upon him, that in a huff he declined to proceed; but he was always a good natured fellow, and, after a little persuasion, he read the play with considerable effect, and we behaved ourselves. We were much impressed with the play, and found it a very remarkable effort for so young a man. As I remember, he wrote it in the early eighties.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

SIMONE GESSO, Duke of Padua.

BEATRICE, his Wife.

ANDREA POLLAIUOLO, Cardinal of Padua.

MAFFIO PETRUCCI
JEPPO VITELOZZO
TADDEO BARDI,
GUIDO FERRANTI
} of the Ducal Household

ASCANIO CRISTOFANO, his Friend.

COUNT MORANZONE

BERNARDO CAVALCANTI, Chief Justiciar of Padua.

HUGO, the Public Executioner.

LUCIA, a Tirewoman

Serving-Men, Burghers, Soldiers, Falconers, Monks, etc.

THE SCENES OF THE PLAY.

ACT I *Market place at Padua*

ACT II *Room in the Ducal Palace*

ACT III *Corridor in the Ducal Palace*

ACT IV *Hall of Justice*

ACT V *Prison*

Scene
Padua.

Time
Latter Half of the Sixteenth Century.

FIRST ACT.

SCENE—*Market-Place at Padua, Noon.*

In the background the Cathedral, a building of black and white marble in the Romanesque style. Marble steps lead up to the Great Door; at foot of these two massive stone lions. Houses on either side, with bright-coloured awnings at the windows, and stone arcades along the front. To right a fountain,—a Triton in antique bronze, blowing his conch at the entrance of his cave. Round the basin runs a stone bench. The Cathedral bells are ringing, and the citizens, men and women and children, are flocking into Church.

GUIDO FERRANTI *and* ASCANIO CRISTOFANO.

ASCANIO

Sure as I'm a man with the breath o' life in me, I'll not budge a step further; else shall I

have no breath left,—to curse withal. 'Od's malison on this jack o'lantern dance, say I! [*Sits down on the stone bench.*]

GUIDO

Nay, lad! it must be here. [*Accosts a passer-by, doffing his cap.*] Pardon me, Sir, is this the Market-Place, and yonder the Church of Santa Croce? [*Citizen nods.*] Thanks, good Sir.

ASCANIO

Well?

GUIDO

Yea! this is the spot.

ASCANIO

I' faith, I would 'twere any other; there's never a tavern in sight.

GUIDO

[*Takes a letter from his pocket and reads.*] "Time—noon; town—Padua; place—the Market square; day—St. Philip's."

ASCANIO

And the man? How says it we are to know *him?*

GUIDO

[*Reads.*] "I shall wear a violet cloak, with a silver falcon embroidered on the shoulder,"—gay apparel, Ascanio!

ASCANIO

I'd liefer have my leathern jerkin. And dost think he will give thee tidings of thy father?

GUIDO

Surely. Dost not remember? 'tis scarce a week agone, I was in the vineyard, at the corner by the high-road, just where the goats aye break in, when a man came riding by who asked me if my name was Guido. Then he gave me this letter signed "Thy father's Friend," bidding me come hither to-day, if I would learn the secret of my birth. I have alway deemed old Pietro my uncle, but the letter said 'twas not so, —that I had but been entrusted to his charge by one whom he had never seen again.

ASCANIO

Dost not know then who thy father was?

GUIDO

No.

ASCANIO

Hast no recollection at all of him?

GUIDO

None, Ascanio, none.

ASCANIO

[*Laughing.*] Ah! then he can never have fetched thee so many a shrewd clout o' the head as mine did me!

GUIDO

[*Smiling.*] Didst never deserve 'em of course, dear lad!

ASCANIO

Never! that was just the sin and shame o't. Not once did conscience round me I was guilty, never once!—What hour did he appoint?

GUIDO

Noon. [*Cathedral clock strikes.*]

ASCANIO

'Tis that now, and our man is not here. I don't believe in him, Guido: I misdoubt 'tis some wench hath cast soft eyes on thee. I have com-

panied thee from Perugia to Padua,—now, o' my life, thou shalt company me to the nearest tavern. [*Rises.*] By the great gods of appetite, Guido, I'm as sharp-set for meat as a widow for a husband, as weary of walking as a maid of moralizing, and as dry as a sermon. Come, Guido! why stand there a-gape at nothing, like the village idiot, would peep into his own pate! Thy man is not coming.

GUIDO

I fear thou'rt i' the right. Ha! [*Just as he is preparing to go off with Ascanio, Count Moranzone appears in a violet cloak having a silver falcon embroidered on the shoulder. He goes up stage to the Cathedral; as he is on the point of entering the church, Guido springs up the steps and intercepts him.*]

MORANZONE

Guido Ferranti, thou art well true to time.

GUIDO

Then my father lives?

MORANZONE

Yea, he lives—in thee. Dost favour him in features, bearing, gait and all outward sem-

blance; I pray thou be his match in mind and mettle.

GUIDO

Tell me of my father! For this moment only have I lived.

MORANZONE

We should be alone.

GUIDO

This is my trustiest friend, who for the love he bears me hath come with me to Padua; there is no secret we share not as brothers.

MORANZONE

One secret thou must not confide to him.

GUIDO

[*To Ascanio.*] Return in an hour's time. He knows not there is naught in this world can dim the flawless mirror of our love. For one hour farewell!

ASCANIO

Talk not with him, he hath the evil eye.

GUIDO

[*Laughing.*] No, no, I have no doubt he will tell me I am a great lord in Italy, and long and merry days await us. Leave us for an hour, dear lad! [*Exit Ascanio.*] Now tell me of my father. [*Sits down on the stone bench.*] Was he tall? This at any rate I know for sure, he sat his horse right gallantly. His hair was dark?—mayhap a red gold, like the glint of fire? Was his voice soft and low? Doughty warriors sometimes have a gentle ring of voice. Or was it like the battle clarion that shatters the foemen's array? Rode he alone to war, or with a brave company of squires and valorous riders? Nay! I feel oft as if the blood of Kings pulsed through my veins. Was he a King?

MORANZONE

He was the kingliest of men.

GUIDO

[*Proudly.*] So, when last you saw him, my noble father towered high above the rest.

MORANZONE

High above others' heads—[*Going up to Guido and laying a hand on his shoulder*] there

on the scaffold, where the headsman's axe lay ready for his neck.

GUIDO

[*Starting back.*] Who art thou, dreadful man, who like a raven, with its ghostly cry, comest from the grave to bring this hapless news?

MORANZONE

Men call me here the Count Moranzone, Lord of a poor mountain hold, a few starveling acres and a scanty crew of henchmen. Yet was I once a Noble of Parma's noblest,—nay! more than that, I was thy father's friend.

GUIDO

[*Seizing the Count's hand.*] Tell me of him.

MORANZONE

Thou art Lorenzo's son, the great Duke, whose banner waved o'er many a hard-fought field, in battle with the Saracen infidels. He was Prince of Parma and Duke of all the fair realm of Lombardy up to the walls of Florence; yea! Florence itself was tributary to him.

GUIDO

Come to his death.

MORANZONE

Thou'lt hear that soon enough! He was at war,—oh! noble warrior-lion that in all Italy would never suffer wrong to be,—he led the fine flower of chivalry against the Lord of Rimini, that foul adulterer Giovanni Malatesta—whom God requite—and was lured by him into a traitorous ambush, bound in caitiff fetters and like a low-lived rascal, like a baseborn knave, butchered by the common headsman before all men's eyes.

GUIDO

[*Grasping his dagger.*] And Malatesta lives?

MORANZONE

No, he is dead.

GUIDO

Dead, you say? Oh! over-hasty Death, hadst but tarried a short while for me, I would have done thine office for thee.

MORANZONE

[*Clasping the young man's wrist.*] 'Tis not too late! The man who sold him is yet alive.

GUIDO

Sold him? my father was sold?

MORANZONE

Yea! sold like a head of bestial; bartered and betrayed for pelf, higgled and chaffered for in secret bargain, by one he thought the paragon of freres,—his bosom friend in whom he trusted, whose love he had knitted to himself by countless benefits. Who on this earth sows kindness reaps only base ingratitude.

GUIDO

So thou'rt alive, false Judas? Well, I will make the wide world thy Potter's field,—go, buy it forthwith, for verily thou must hang there.

MORANZONE

Judas, thou saidst? Yea! Judas in his unfaith, but he was craftier than Judas was; thirty pieces of silver *he* deemed too scant a price.

GUIDO

And what gat he for my father's head?

MORANZONE

What gat he? Why, cities, fiefs and principalities,—vineyards and broad lands.

GUIDO

Whereof he shall keep but six poor feet of soil, to rot in. Where is he, the accursed villain, tell me where? Show me the fellow, and though he come steel clad from head to foot, armoured and mailed in panoply, yea! guarded by a thousand horsemen,—yet will I pierce the bulwark of their spears and see his black heart's blood distil its latest drop from off my blade. I will kill him.

MORANZONE

[*Speaking deliberately.*] Fool, dost call that revenge? Death is the final lot of all us mortals, and if he come suddenly, why, then 'tis so much gained! [*Goes close up to Guido.*] Thy father was sold, sold,—be that thy cue; sell thou the seller in thy turn! Thou must to Court, sit at the same board with him, eat of the same bread.

GUIDO

Ah, bitter bread!

MORANZONE

Thy palate is too nice; vengeance will sweeten the taste. O' nights thou must be his boon-companion at the revel, his closest friend, that he may cling confidingly to thee and tell thee all

his wiles. Laugh, if he asks thy merriment; runs his humour to melancholy, don mourning weeds! When the time is ripe—[*Guido grasps his sword.*] No, no, I cannot trust thee; thy hot-blooded youth and unbridled temper will not wait for this slow satisfaction, but will shipwreck our schemes of vengeance.

GUIDO

You know me not. Tell me his name, and I will follow your counsel in all ways.

MORANZONE

When the time is fully come, the victim lulled asleep, the hour favourable, I will send thee secretly a sign by a speedy messenger.

GUIDO

Speak, how is the man to die?

MORANZONE

That night thou must clamber to his sleeping room,—note it well!

GUIDO

Nay, have no fear.

MORANZONE

I know not if crime-laden folk do sleep; but if he sleeps, then wake him first, and grip him by the throat—so, dost understand? Tell him of what blood thou art, of whose begetting, and the motive of thy vengeance; then let him cringe to thee, cringe on his bended knees. Let him proffer thee his hoarded treasures for his life, and when he sacrifices all his fortune, say this: "I want not gold, mercy I know not,"—and straightway to thy task. Now swear, thou wilt not slay him ere I give the word; else I return home again and leave thee yet in ignorance and thy father unavenged.

GUIDO

I swear by my father's battle-flag—

MORANZONE

The headsman tore it to tatters in the open Market-square.

GUIDO

By my father's grave then—

MORANZONE

Grave! What grave? Thy gallant father

hath no grave. His dust was scattered to the winds, his ashes borne by the breeze about the streets like chaff that pricks the eyes of beggarmen. His head was spiked before the gaol, tricked out in mockery with a paper crown, that the scurrilous rabble of the town might whet their ribald tongues at his expense.

GUIDO

Was all this so? Then by my father's spotless name, by his shameful, hideous death, by his friend's abject villainy,—these things at least remain,—by these I swear I will not assail his life until you bid me,—*then* God help his soul; he shall die, die worse than a dog's death! And now, the sign?

MORANZONE

This dagger, thy father's dagger, boy.

GUIDO

Oh! let me see it close. Ah! now I remember me how my so-called uncle, good old man, spake of a cloak,—as a babe I was wrapped in it,—whereon were woven in gold two leopards such as these; in steel as here they like me better,—

they're fitter for my purpose. Speak, Sir, have you no word to give me from my father?

MORANZONE

Thou never saw'st thy father—After his false friend had bewrayed him, I only escaped of all his liegemen to carry the fatal news to Parma to the Duchess.

GUIDO

Tell me of my mother.

MORANZONE

Thy mother—she was a very Saint of purity—fell into a swoon at the tidings, was seized with pangs of childbirth 'fore the time—she had been wed but seven short months—and brought thee prematurely into the world. Then fled her soul heavenward, to welcome thy father at the gate of Paradise.

GUIDO

The mother dead, the father bought and sold! Meseems as though I stood upon a beleaguered rampart, and messenger after messenger came to bring me Job's tidings. Prithee, let me get my breath; my ears are dinned with ill news.

MORANZONE

When thy mother died, in fear of foes I spread the report that thou too wast dead; then I spirited thee away, and carried thee to a trusty vassal, who dwells at Perugia; thou know'st the rest.

GUIDO

Saw you ever my father again?

MORANZONE

Yea, once; clad in the mean garb of a vine-dresser, I crept to Rimini.

GUIDO

Oh noble heart!

MORANZONE

At Rimini everything is to be had for gold—I bribed his gaolers. When thy father learned that a son was born to him, his eye flashed clear beneath his brows, like distant lightning on the main. He gripped my hand, and made me swear to rear thee worthily of him,—and I took the oath. Do thou revenge his death on the false friend!

GUIDO

For my dead father's sake, I thank thee. . . . Now his name?

MORANZONE

How thou remind'st me of him! in every lineament thou'rt his fellow.

GUIDO

The villain's name!

MORANZONE

Thou'lt learn it soon; the Duke is e'en now on his way hither, with his Court.

GUIDO

What of that? Tell me his name!

MORANZONE

Think'st not they make a gallant band of worshipful and stalwart gentlemen?

GUIDO

The name, Count!

[*The Duke of Padua enters, attended by Count Bardi, Maffio Petrucci, and other noblemen of his Court.*]

MORANZONE

[*Quickly.*] The man to whom I kneel is thy father's murderer. Mark him!

GUIDO

[*Reaching for the dagger.*] The Duke!

MORANZONE

Keep thy fingers from the steel. What, dost forget so soon?—[*Kneels to the Duke.*] My noble Lord!

DUKE

Greeting to ye, Moranzone; 'tis long since we have seen you at Padua. We were hunting yesterday around your Castle—you call it a Castle, yon chilly house wherein you sit mumbling o'er your beads, a-making your confession like a good old man; I am never like to be a good old man; God would be outwearied with the confession of my sins! [*Sees Guido, and draws back.*] Who is that yonder?

MORANZONE

My sister's son, your Grace! just come of age for bearing arms; he would fain tarry a while at Court.

DUKE

[*Still gazing at Guido.*] How is he called?

MORANZONE

Guido Ferranti, my Lord!

DUKE

Of what city?

MORANZONE

He springs from Mantua.

DUKE

[*Approaching Guido.*] Thou hast the eyes of one I knew,—but he died childless. Thou would'st serve with me? well, we lack soldiers.—Art honest, sirrah? Then make no truck with thine honesty, keep it for thyself. At Padua honesty is deemed ostentation; so 'tis clean out o' fashion there. Look, see these lords, they smell of amber and perfumes. . . .

BARDI

[*Aside.*] For sure the poisoned shaft is aimed at us.

DUKE

Every man thou see'st hath his price; albeit—to pose as incorruptible—some set it high.

BARDI

I thought as much.

DUKE

So give up honesty. Singularity is no profitable quality, albeit in these stale, flat, insipid days, the very most singular thing a man can do is to have wits, for then the rabble jeers him. The rabble! scorn thou it as I do. Its praise is froth, and I count its windy favour accordingly. Popularity is the one insult I have never had to abide.

MAFFIO

[*Aside.*] He hath had no lack of hate, an that be what he craves.

DUKE

Be crafty; in thy dealings with the world, curb thine impetuousness! Think twice! The first impulse is oftenest good-natured.

GUIDO

[*Aside.*] On his lips sits a toad that distils its venom thence.

DUKE

Give heed to foes, else will the world think light of thee; 'tis in its eyes a proof of power. Yet show a smiling mask of friendship to every man, till what time thou hast him safe in hand. Then crush him!

GUIDO

[*Aside.*] Oh wise Philosopher! Art digging a deep grave for thine own self.

MORANZONE

[*To Guido.*] Dost mark his words?

GUIDO

Yea, only too well!

DUKE

And never be over scrupulous; the hand that is clean is empty, and offers a pitiful show. Would'st have the lion's share in life's good things, why, don the fox's skin; it will bestead thee well. 'Tis a coat that fits every man, fat and lean, great and small; who makes thee such

a coat, is a tailor will never lack for customers.

GUIDO

Your Grace, I will remember.

DUKE

Good, my lad, good! I care not to have about me shallow fools, that mete out the gold of life with niggling scruples, and shifting, shuffling, come to shipwreck; failure is the one fault I never know. Let me have men about me. Conscience is but a name that dastard cowardice scrawls on the shield. Dost understand me, sirrah?

GUIDO

Yea, your Grace; in all ways will I obey your golden rule.

MAFFIO

Never have I seen your Grace so much inclined for preaching; the Cardinal must have an eye to his laurels.

DUKE

My gospel is practised by the world, his only talked about. I think little of the Cardinal; he must needs be a pious churchman that will deny

his tediousness. Well, young sir, we number thee to-day amongst our Household. [*Reaches Guido his hand to kiss. Guido starts back in horror, but at a warning gesture from Count Moranzone, kneels and kisses the Duke's hand.*] Henceforward thou must be accoutred as beseems our Court and thine own honour.

GUIDO

From my heart I thank your Grace.

DUKE

Tell me again; what was your name?

GUIDO

Guido Ferranti, my Lord.

DUKE

From Mantua? Have a care for your wives, when so trim a gallant comes to Padua. Yea, you do well to laugh, Count Bardi, I know right well how merry-hearted is the man at whose hearth sits an uncomely wife.

MAFFIO

By leave, your Grace, the dames of Padua are above suspicion.

DUKE

What, are all foul-featured? Come, the Cardinal hath long been waiting our pious consort; why, folk should clip him both his sermon and his beard. Will you with us, Count, and help us hear a homily of good St. Jerome.

MORANZONE

[*Bowing.*] Alas, my Lord. . . .

DUKE

[*Interrupting.*] Spare your excuses; you would as lief miss the Mass. Now follow all.

[*Disappears with his train into the Cathedral.*]

GUIDO

[*After a pause.*] My father was the Duke's victim, and I kissed his hand!

MORANZONE

Oft do it in the future!

GUIDO

Must I?

MORANZONE

Yea! thou hast sworn an oath.

GUIDO

My oath doth make me hard as granite.

MORANZONE

Farewell, my son; thou see'st me no more till the time is ripe.

GUIDO

I implore you, come soon.

MORANZONE

I will be to hand, when the time is ripe; be ready!

GUIDO

Have no fear.

MORANZONE

Yonder comes thy friend. Banish him from Padua, and from thy heart.

GUIDO

Yea, from Padua; from my heart, no.

MORANZONE

Nay, it must needs be. I will not leave thee, till thou hast done it.

GUIDO

Do you grudge me every friend?

MORANZONE

Revenge be thy friend, thou need'st no other.

GUIDO

Well, well, so be it!

ASCANIO

[*Ascanio Christofano enters.*] Guido, lad, I have outdone thee every way. I have drunk a flask of wine, eaten a pasty and kissed the serving-wench. Thou look'st as down i' the mouth as a schoolboy that cannot buy him apples, or a potwalloper that cannot sell his vote. What is the news, Guido?

GUIDO

Ascanio, we two must part.

ASCANIO

That may be something new, but 'tis not true.

GUIDO

Too true, Ascanio; thou must now begone, and should'st never see my face again.

ASCANIO

No, no; thou dost not know me really, Guido mine. I am but a lowly farmer's son, ill practised in the use of courtly manners; so I can still, an thou art of noble lineage, be thy henchman. I will guard thee truer than an hireling doth.

GUIDO

[*Seizing his hand.*] Ascanio! [*Sees Moranzone's menacing look and drops Ascanio's hand.*] It cannot be.

ASCANIO

Hath it come to this with thee? Why, methought the friendship of the antique world was not yet dead, that the Roman exemplar might in our flat, stale and unheroic days yet find its worthy counterpart. By the love that sleeps peaceful as the summer seas, what fortune hath betid thee? May I share it?

GUIDO

Share it?

ASCANIO

Yea, share it.

GUIDO

Never, never.

ASCANIO

Hath an heritage come to thee,—a Castle with strong towers, and gold to boot?

GUIDO

[*Bitterly.*] Yea, I have entered on mine heritage. Oh, bloody legacy, horrid heirship! Verily must I guard it anxiously like any miser, and keep all for myself! Wherefore, I prithee, leave me now.

ASCANIO

What, must we never more sit hand in hand, as once we used, buried so deep in an old tome of chivalry that curly head touched curly head? must we never more play truant, and away to follow the huntsman through the Autumn woods, and watch the falcons shake off their jesses, as puss breaks from the covert?

GUIDO

Never more.

ASCANIO

Must I leave thee then without one fond word?

GUIDO

Leave me, and my love go with thee.

ASCANIO

Unknightly, churlish thy behaviour!

GUIDO

Unknightly, churlish—yea, an thou wilt. . . . Why waste more useless words? Fare thee well!

ASCANIO

Hast thou no word of kindly parting, Guido?

GUIDO

No. The past all lies behind me like a dream. To-day a new life begins. Farewell!

ASCANIO

Farewell! [*Exit slowly and reluctantly.*]

GUIDO

Well, are you content? Saw you not how I drave from me my friend and staunchest comrade, as he were a kitchen scullion? Oh, to think I could treat him so!—Are you now content?

MORANZONE

I am content. But now my way is back to my

desert fortalice in the hills. Forget not the token,—thy father's dagger. Whenas I send it thee, fulfil thy task!

GUIDO

Be sure I will. [*Exit Count Moranzone.*] Oh, Everliving God, should my soul yet retain some trace of human nature,—kindly ruth or soft sympathy,—wither, consume, destroy it! An Thou dost not, I must myself cut compassion with cold steel from out my heart, I must smother pity in my sleep o' nights, that it speak not within me. Revenge for me! Revenge, be thou my bedfellow, my bosom friend, sit thou by me, ride with me to the chase; if I am a-weary, sing me sweet songs, if I am light-hearted, make merry with me, and if I dream, whisper in mine ear the hideous story of my father's murder—Said I murder? [*Draws his dagger.*] Then hear me, God of Vengeance! Oh God, Thou God which punishest all perjury, may Thine angels record this my solemn oath in flames of fire, that till the day I expiate my father's death with blood, I will forego the noble ties of honourable friendship, the noble joys of comradeship, the union of loving souls and heart-

felt gratitude,—yea more, from this hour forth I do foreswear the love of women and that hollow bauble men call female loveliness—[*The organ peals out in the Cathedral. Beneath a canopy of cloth of silver borne by four pages in scarlet, the Duchess of Padua descends the Church steps; as she passes Guido, their eyes meet for an instant, and as she leaves the stage, she turns to look back at the young man, whose dagger drops from his hand.*] Say, who is yonder lady?

BURGHER

The Duchess of Padua!

ACT-DROP.

SECOND ACT.

SCENE—*A State Apartment in the Duke's Castle.*

The walls are hung with tapestry representing the festal procession of Venus and the Graces. A wide central door leads onto a loggia with pillars of red marble, affording a view over Padua. To right, a great canopy, with three thrones, one being higher than the others. The ceiling is decorated with long gilt rays to imitate sunbeams. Furniture of the period,—seats covered in gilt and embossed leather, buffets set out with gold and silver plate, and chests painted with mythological scenes. A throng of Courtiers stands outside on the loggia, looking into the street below, from which ascends the roaring of a disorderly rabble, and shouts of "Down with the Duke." After a short pause, enter the Duke, very calm. He leans on Ferranti's arm, and is

accompanied by the Cardinal. The outcries continue unabated.

DUKE

No, Cardinal, I have had full enough of her; she is worse than wicked,—good.

MATTIO

[*Excitedly.*] Two thousand folk, Highness, are come together, clamouring more insolently every moment.

DUKE

Pshaw! they but offend their lungs! Who brawls so loud, my lords, will do us no hurt; the only foes I fear are the silent ones. [*Howls from the crowd.*] Look you, Cardinal, how my people loves me; they offer me a serenade, I had liefer hear it than any soft complaining of the lute. Is't not ecstasy to hearken to it? [*Renewed outcry.*] Alas! they be a trifle out of tune; therefore must my men shoot at them. A cats' concert I cannot brook. Petrucci, go tell the Captain of our Guard below to clear the Square. Art hard o' hearing? Do what I wish.

[*Exit Petrucci.*]

CARDINAL

I do beseech your Grace, give ear to their distress.

DUKE

[*Seating himself on the throne.*] Why yes, the pears all this year have never been so fine as of yore. I pray you pardon, Cardinal, I thought you spake of pears. [*A shout of joy from the populace.*] What means that?

GUIDO

[*Rushes to the window.*] The Duchess is below in the Square,—pacing betwixt the soldiers and the folk, to stay the firing.

DUKE

The Foul Fiend have her!

GUIDO

[*Still at the window.*] Now hath she entered the Palace,—a dozen burghers after her.

DUKE

[*Springing up.*] The Duchess, by Heaven! she doth presume too far.

BARDI

She is here.

DUKE

Shut yonder door; the morning air strikes cold. [*The door onto the loggia henceforth remains closed.—The Duchess enters, followed by a band of shabbily clad burghers.*]

BEATRICE

[*Falling on her knees.*] I do beseech your Grace; hear our petition.

DUKE

Am I a tailor, lady wife, that you appear before me with so ragged a crew?

BEATRICE

Their rags make manifest, methought, their distress more clearer than I can myself.

DUKE

Wherein standeth their distress?

BEATRICE

Ah, my good lord, day by day they do endure such dole as neither you nor I nor ever a one of all these noble lords have ever used to have the

faintest thought of. Why, the very bread they eat is baked of half rotten husks.

FIRST BURGHER

Yea, nothing but husks.

DUKE

A fine nourishing food; I give it my own nags.

BEATRICE

[*Persisting.*] And the water that flows into the town cisterns is corrupted by the breach of the aqueduct to foul swamps and miry pools.

DUKE

Drink wine; water is most unwholesome.

SECOND BURGHER

Ah, but, your Grace, the tolls are grown so high that be levied at the city gate that wine is not for us.

DUKE

Then commend the tolls, seeing they keep you sober.

BEATRICE

Think how we flaunt in pomp and splendour

here, and lack naught that luxury and wealth can crave, with hosts of servants to obey our every nod. Whiles through *their* sunless lanes slinks haggard misery, and with sharp knife stealthily and noiselessly slits the little children's throats.

THIRD BURGHER

Yea verily, so 'tis; my pretty lad died yesterday of hunger. He was six years old; I am so poor I cannot bury him.

DUKE

Art poor? then dost not feel happy to say as much? Why, poverty is a Christian virtue; [*To the Cardinal*] is't not so? You, Cardinal, I know have fat livings, tythes and lands,—that make you ready enow to preach voluntary poverty.

BEATRICE

My noble Duke, my husband, be pitiful! Whiles we sit here in proud palaces with pillared porticoes to guard us from the sun, with walls and roofs to keep out the winter's cold, there's many a burgher here in Padua lives in so vile a hole that rain and snow and blustering wind

are fellow lodgers with him. Others sleep of autumn nights under the arches of the city bridges, till the damp mists stiffen their limbs, and fever comes, and then—

DUKE

—they are safe hid in Abraham's bosom. Them that be so wretched here below, I send 'em up to Heaven. And do they ever thank me for't? [*To the Cardinal.*] Stands it not somewhere set down in Holy Writ, that every man should be content with that state of life God sends him? Why must I meddle therewith, and botch the handiwork of all-wise Providence? It hath decreed that some men starve, whiles others feast. The world is none of my making.

FIRST BURGHER

The Duke hath a hard heart.

SECOND BURGHER

Hist, neighbour, I hope the Cardinal is going to speak for us.

CARDINAL

Verily 'tis a Christian duty to bear poverty, for God doth appoint a rich reward thereto; yet

is it no less Christian to be charitable, to still hunger and heal pain. Meseems here in our city are many wrongs Your Highness' wisdom should reform.

FIRST BURGHER

What is this "reform"! What means it, eh?

SECOND BURGHER

'Faith! it means this, to let all be as 'tis. I would have somewhat else.

DUKE

Reform! you, Cardinal, spake of reform? In Germany lives a man called Luther, who would fain reform your Roman Church. Well, have ye not proclaimed him heretic, and hang not the Church's ban and interdict over his head?

CARDINAL

[*Starting up.*] He hath lured the flock from out the fold,—all we ask is that *you* feed the sheep.

DUKE

I have shorn their fleece, so I may well feed

them. But the rebels—[*The Duchess raises appealing hands.*]

FIRST BURGHER

Hist! a word of pity, he will grant us some boon.

SECOND BURGHER

Dost think so?

DUKE

For this ragged rabble that comes here before me,—their mouths are swollen with treason—

THIRD BURGHER

Softly, my noble Duke; then stop 'em with bread. We will be quiet enow then.

DUKE

Nay, but ye shall keep quiet, hungry or full. My lords, so mutinous have grown the times, the yokel scarce lifts his hat and fears no blows, while the day labourer hustles the noble in the open street. Now God hath appointed me for scourge to this rout, to chastise them for their sins.

BEATRICE

By what right? Art *thou* so sinless?

DUKE

If virtue punish sin, 'tis naught; but let sin chasten sin; then is God well pleased.

BEATRICE

Have you no awe of Heaven?

DUKE

Have I aught to fear? Man's enemy, am I not God's friend? [*To the Burghers.*] Now, my good, trusty men of Padua, anent the petition of the Duchess,—to deny a boon to so fair an advocate, were to lack love and courtesy,—I promise this, to do something for your distress—

FIRST BURGHER

Now is he going to abolish the tolls!

SECOND BURGHER

Or have them give us each a loaf of bread!

DUKE

Next Sunday shall the Cardinal choose for his sermon after the blessed Mass the text: "how

beautiful a thing it is to be obedient!" [*Murmurs from the Burghers.*]

FIRST BURGHER

That will not fill our bellies.

SECOND BURGHER

A sermon is but a poor sauce, an a man have nothing more.

BEATRICE

Poor folk, ye see I have no weight with the Duke; but get you to the Castle yard, and my treasurer shall share amongst you an hundred ducats from my chest, albeit gold is not always over plentiful therein.

ALMONER

An hundred ducats is the whole sum it holds.

BEATRICE

Give them what I have.

FIRST BURGHER

God keep the Duchess!

SECOND BURGHER

God keep her Grace!

BEATRICE

And every Monday morn bread shall be given to them in need. [*The Burghers bow themselves out.*]

FIRST BURGHER

[*As he goes.*] God keep the Duchess, say I again.

DUKE

[*Calling him back.*] Come hither, fellow! What is thy name?

FIRST BURGHER

Dominic, my Lord.

DUKE

A fine name! Prithee, why Dominic, and no other?

FIRST BURGHER

[*Scratching his head.*] Because that I was born on St. George's day.

DUKE

An excellent good reason! Here's a ducat for thee; now shout likewise,—God keep the Duke!

FIRST BURGHER

[*Feebly.*] God keep the Duke!

DUKE

Louder, fellow, louder!

FIRST BURGHER

[*A trifle louder.*] God keep the Duke!

DUKE

More gleefully, fellow; put more heart in't! See, here's another ducat for thee.

FIRST BURGHER

[*Overjoyed.*] God keep the Duke!

DUKE

[*Mockingly.*] My lords, the love of this simple fellow stirs me deeply. [*Addressing the Burgher roughly.*] Begone, sirrah! [*Exit Burgher, bowing low.*] This is the trick o't to buy popularity nowadays. Yea, we are naught, if we be not democratical. [*To the Duchess.*] So, gracious lady, you stir up mutiny amongst our citizens, and by your daily alms-giving have filched the love o' the common herd. I cannot suffer this.

BEATRICE

[*Casting a glance at Guido.*] You are in error, my Lord; they love me not.

DUKE

I will not have you give bread to the folk, only because they be hungry.

BEATRICE

The poor have unimpeachable rights,—the right to pity and the right to mercy.

DUKE

Thou pratest to me of rights? And this is the woman for whose sake I forewent my claim to three of the fairest towns in Italy, Pisa, Genoa and Orvieto.

BEATRICE

Promised, my lord, but not fulfilled! you broke your word, as alway.

DUKE

You do me wrong. Reasons of State it was. . . .

BEATRICE

What cause of State *can* justify the breach of plighted word?

DUKE

There is a forest nigh Pisa, yea, close by the city, where wild-boars lurk; when I promised Pisa to thy father,—the sanguine fool,—I had forgot the fine sport there.

BEATRICE

The man that is foresworn in honour, my Lord, doth forget all.

DUKE

In Genoa, that is the place—yea, I am sure on't—they say red surmullet do swim in the bay more plentiful than anywhere in Italy. [*Turning to one of his train.*] You, my lord, you seem a hearty trencherman, you can tell our Duchess if 'tis true.

BEATRICE

And Orvieto?

DUKE

[*Yawning.*] It hath slipped my remembrance, why I gave him not Orvieto,—in terms of our covenant. Mayhap I felt not so disposed. [*Going up to the Duchess.*] Now look about you. Here you are alone. Back to France is many a

long dusty mile; and even there, your father keeps at his Court a bare hundred paltry knights. Hop'st yet for companionship? Who of all these lords, the noble cavaliers of Padua, stands true to thee?

BEATRICE

Not one. [*Guido starts forward, but restrains himself.*]

DUKE

And never will, so long as I am Duke in Padua. Understand me,—I have had enow of thy charitable ways; thou art my property, so do what I bid. An 'tis my will to hold thee in the house, my Palace here must be thy prison; and if I will thou goest forth abroad, thou must from morn till eve be free as air.

BEATRICE

What right have you . . . ?

DUKE

The second Duchess once asked me that same question; canst see her tomb in the Church of good St. Bartholomew, carven of red marble,—wondrous fine! Give me thine arm, Guido! My

lords, let us throw off our falcons at the midday hour. Bethink you, you are alone here, noble lady.

[*Exit Duke, leaning on Guido's arm, and followed by his retinue.*]

BEATRICE

[*Looking after them.*] Strange that anyone, blameless to all seeming, doth love the Duke, hangs on his lips, that foully poison every word, and shrinks not from him, as though bound to his service! Well, what of it? it doth concern me not. I stand alone, to love inaccessible. The Duke saith well, I am alone, forlorn and disgraced and belittled—did ever woman stand so all alone as I? The wooer calls us pretty children, saith we be not fit to make a life for ourselves, and therefore doth ruin the life we had. What said I, "Wooers"? We are their goods and chattels, their slaves; we are not so fondly fondled as the dog that licks their hand, as the falcon on their wrist. I said, "Wooers"? Nay, we be bought and sold, our very body is so much pelf to them. I wis it is poor woman's usual lot,—her life, mated with a man she loves not, makes shipwreck on his selfishness; but

being usual, 'tis no less hard to bear. Meseems I never yet heard a woman laugh, laugh out of pure light-heartedness,—except one that stood at night i' the public street—poor soul! She had painted lips, a mask of joy to hide her sorrow, and she laughed,—pray God I may never laugh so. To die were better! [*Guido enters unobserved from behind; the Duchess throws herself down before a figure of the Madonna.*] Oh Holy Mary, with the sweet, wan look, ringed with little angel heads that hover round thee, know'st thou no succour for me? Oh Mother of God, know'st thou no succour?

GUIDO

No, I can bear it no more. I must speak to her, speak to my love. Am I, fair lady, embraced in your prayer?

BEATRICE

[*Rising.*] Only unhappy souls need my intercession.

GUIDO

Then needs must I be one, for sure!

BEATRICE

Why so? Doth not the Duke do thee honour

enow? dost lack advancement at our Court? 'Tis not within my power to give it thee; mine own self, I have as good as no weight here.

GUIDO

Of favour, your Grace, I have no lack from the Duke,—whom my soul loathes worse than hell,—I come on my knees to offer you true-proven service unto death.

BEATRICE

Alackaday! I am fallen so low in place, I can reward thee only with niggard thanks.

GUIDO

[*Seizing her hand.*] And not with love? [*The Duchess starts back, Guido falls at her feet.*] Oh dear Saint! Forgive me, I have been over bold. Thy beauty sets my young blood glowing. An my mouth but touch thy hand in lowly greeting, leaps every nerve so fierce with passion, that I fear no extremity of daring for to win thy love. [*Springs to his feet.*] Bid me fare forth, and pluck renown from out the lion's jaws,—I will wrestle with the Nemean monster in the desert wastes! Toss into the throat of battle a riband, a flower, a bit of tinsel, anything, that hath once

touched thee, I will bring it back to thee unscathed, in combat with all the knights of Christendom! Yea, more than that, bid me to scale the white cliffs of mighty England, and from her presumptuous scutcheon will I blot out thy France's lilies, which England, yon lion of the seas, hath filched from her.

Oh loved Beatrice! drive me not from thy side, for the minutes creep past leaden-footed without thee; though, an I look upon thy loveliness, the hours flit by like winged Mercuries, and the world gleams all golden.

BEATRICE

I never dreamed I could be really loved. Dost truly love me so immeasurably as thou dost declare?

GUIDO

Go, ask the sea-gull an she loves the waves, ask the roses an they love the rain, ask the lark, that will not sing before the break of dawn, an she loves the day,—and then these be but empty pictures, mere shadows of my love. 'Tis a fierce fire that all the waters of the ocean cannot extinguish.—Give me a word!

BEATRICE

Scarce know I what I should say.

GUIDO

Say, thou lov'st me.

BEATRICE

Is that thy behest? And must it be fulfilled forthwith? Yea, it might well be so, an if I really loved thee; but if not, what am I then to say?

GUIDO

An if thou lov'st me not, yet say thou dost; the lie would be shamed to truth upon thy tongue.

BEATRICE

Or should I remain for ever dumb? Lovers, they say, are happiest, when they be in doubt.

GUIDO

No! doubt doth kill me; and, must I die, let me die of joy, and not of doubt. Oh, tell me,—may I stay, or must I go?

BEATRICE

I would thou mightest neither stay nor go. If

thou dost stay, thou steal'st my love from me; and if thou goest, thou takest it away with thee. An all the morning stars could sing, they might not manifest the greatness of my love. Guido, I love thee.

GUIDO

[*With outstretched arms.*] Oh, never stop,—only by night, I thought once, sang the nightingale,—but if thou must be silent, let my lips find thine, that make so sweet a sound.

BEATRICE

My lips do not yet give thee my heart.

GUIDO

Dost thou steel that against me then?

BEATRICE

Ah, my love's lord, 'tis mine no longer; the first day I saw thee, I let my heart be filched away by thee,—thief against my will, who rashly brakest into my guarded treasure house and stole away my jewel! Strange robbery, which doth enrich thee, without thy knowing it, and hath left me poorer, yet all so happy.

GUIDO

[*Embracing her.*] Oh, my love, my love! Hide not thy head so! Let me open the little scarlet gates, that closed in music, dive after corals, and I will win a richer booty than all the gold the griffin guards in Armenia's wilderness.

BEATRICE

Thou, Guido, art my lord, what I possess is thine; what not, thy fancy lends me lavishly, which doth squander your treasures as they were a bauble. [*Kisses him.*]

GUIDO

How bold methinks I am to look at you like this. The gentle violet lurks beneath the leaf and fears to gaze at the great sun in dread of so much brightness; yet have mine eyes, presumptuous eyes! now grown so froward that like twin fixed stars they gaze at thee unwinking, rioting in thy loveliness.

BEATRICE

Dearest, would thou mightest watch me for aye! Thine eyes are polished mirrors; by looking in them, I can see myself therein, and so I know my likeness lives in thee.

GUIDO .

[*Taking her in his arms.*] Stay still, thou heavenly orb, and make this hour eternal! [*A pause.*]

BEATRICE

Sit a little lower, yea just so, that my fingers may slip through thy hair, that thy face may be lifted like a cup to meet my kiss.

Hast ever marked, if one unloek a long neglected room,—heavy with dust and fouled with stains of mould, that foot of man hath not trod for years,—take down the rusty bars from the windows and throw wide the broken shutters, for to let the sun stream in,—hast marked how the sun doth transform eaeh sooty flake of dust into a brilliant atom of dancing gold? Mine heart is like to that long empty hall, love glints gaily into it, and hath lent all life its gold. Dost not think love is the whole eontents of life?

GUIDO

Yea, without love is life but an unhewn block, lying in the quarry, till the earver's hand awake the god within. Without love life is dumb as a common reed, that grows in marshes and by river banks, and holds no music.

BEATRICE

Yet therefrom the minstrel Love will cut a pipe, and draw forth music from it; so Love charms melody from out each life. Say I not true?

GUIDO

'Tis women make it true. With pencil and with chisel do men work,—the dyer's son, Paul Veronese, their great rival at Venice, who painted God's Magdalen, slim as a lily and as white, mounting the Temple steps, and Raphael, who painted divine Madonnas, divine in their pure motherhood,—and yet are women the greatest artists of this earth; they model men's daily life, which the greed of gold of our days doth degrade, and make it fair by love.

BEATRICE

Ah, Guido, I would that thou and I were poor, —the poor, that love each other, are so rich.

GUIDO

Say once more that thou lov'st me, Beatrice.

BEATRICE

[*Letting her fingers glide round his collar.*]

How close the collar of thy doublet fits about thy neck! [*Count Moranzone looks in through the door of the external corridor.*]

GUIDO

Nay, tell me that thou lov'st me.

BEATRICE

I do remember, when as a child I dwelt in my loved France at the Court at Fontainebleau, the King wore such a collar.

GUIDO

But tell me that thou lov'st me!

BEATRICE

[*Jestingly.*] The King of France was an illustrious hero, yet was he not so kingly as thou art. Why needs must I confess my love to thee? [*She takes his head between her hands and lifts his face to hers.*] Thou know'st I do belong to thee for ever, with soul and body both? [*She kisses him, then suddenly notices Moranzone and springs up.*] Ha, what is that? [*Moranzone disappears.*]

GUIDO

What, dearest?

BEATRICE

Methought I saw two eyes of flame prying upon us through the doorway.

GUIDO

Nay, it was nothing. Only the sentinel's shadow moved across the floor. [*The Duchess still stands staring at the window.*] 'Twas nothing, love.

BEATRICE

What now need trouble us, who are in Love's guard and keeping? 'Twere all indifferent to me, an if the world and its menial backbiters should trample down and tread out my life. They say the common flowers of the field do shed a sweeter perfume, if they be trod on, than if they bloom undisturbed, and many plants, else scentless, diffuse only in death, when they are broken and torn, the odours of Araby. So is it with young lives, which daily stress is like to crush; it doth express all their sweets and oft heightens yet more their charm. Love is the crown of life; think'st not 'tis so?

GUIDO

Come, let us sport and sing! I feel I fain would sing now.

BEATRICE

Nay, hush! At times it seems as though all existence were narrowed to one single transport of delight, and joy's very intensity laid a seal upon the lips.

GUIDO

Let my lips break this seal! Thou lov'st me, Beatrice?

BEATRICE

Is't not strange, that loving thee, I should love mine enemy?

GUIDO

Thine enemy,—what enemy?

BEATRICE

Thyself, who with Love's shaft hast pierced my heart,—poor heart, that lived but for itself alone, till thine arrow struck it.

GUIDO

Ah, Beatrice, myself have been wounded so

sore by this same bow, that all untended I lie here to die, unless, beloved physician, thou dost heal me.

BEATRICE

Nay, I cannot make thee whole, for I am sick of the same sickness.

GUIDO

Oh, how I love thee! I must e'en rob the cuckoo of his voice, and sing one note for aye.

BEATRICE

Nay, sing no other! An this be the cuckoo's lay, then is the nightingale hoarse-throated, and the shrill lark hath lost her melody.

GUIDO

Kiss me, Beatrice! [*She takes his head between her hands, bends over and kisses him; a loud knocking is heard at the door,—Guido springs up. A serving-man enters.*]

SERVING-MAN

A packet for your Worship!

GUIDO

[*Carelessly.*] Ah, hand it here!

[*The serving-man hands him the packet in a wrapper of vermilion silk, and goes off; as Guido is in the act of opening it, the Duchess slips behind him and snatches it away in jest.*]

BEATRICE

[*Laughing.*] What is to wager, it comes from a girl?—she would fain see thee wearing her colours; I do begrudge her the smallest part in thee. Nay, like a miser I must have thee all, e'en though I may spoil thee by my greed.

GUIDO

'Tis nothing.

BEATRICE

A maid doth send it thee.

GUIDO

Thou know'st well, 'tis nothing.

BEATRICE

[*Turns away and opens the packet.*] Traitor, tell me now, what means this: a dagger—two leopards on it of steel.

GUIDO

[*Takes the dagger out of her hands.*] Oh, God!

BEATRICE

Well then, I will look out o' window; mayhap I may recognize by his arms the messenger who gave it to the porter at the Gate. I will never rest till I do know thy secret. [*Runs out onto the loggia laughing.*]

GUIDO

'Tis horrible! So soon have I forgot my father's death, so readily admitted love into mine heart, that now must I ruthlessly banish it away and let in murder, that knocks fiercely at the door. I must! Have I not sworn an oath? Yet not to-night. Nay, it must be to-day. Farewell then, all joy and light of life; farewell, all memory of gentleness; farewell, Beloved! Can I with blood-stained hands stroke and caress her hands of innocence? with lips still wet with gore meet hers? Can a murderer's eyes look into her flowerlike orbs, that would strike me blind, to languish henceforth in eternal night? Nay, murder hath set up a barrier betwixt us—too high for exchange of kisses.

BEATRICE

Guido!

GUIDO

Beatrice, forget, forget that name, strike it out for ever from thy life!

BEATRICE

[*Drawing near him.*] Best beloved!

GUIDO

[*Shrinking back.*] A barrier is risen up betwixt us twain, that we may not pass.

BEATRICE

Naught is there I dare not do, an thou be near me.

GUIDO

Ah, there it is, I cannot be near thee, cannot more breathe the same air with thee, nor greet thy beauty with glance from eye to eye; it doth unnerve my wavering heart and makes my flaccid hand to miss its aim. I prithee, let me go; forget that thou hast ever seen me!

BEATRICE

How, with thy kisses still hot upon my lips, forget the love plights that thou swearest?

GUIDO

I take them back.

BEATRICE

Thou canst not, Guido, they are a part of elemental nature; the air throbs with their harmony, and these fond oaths do give a sweeter melody to the song of birds.

GUIDO

Now is a barrier risen 'twixt us twain, before forgotten or not known.

BEATRICE

No, there is no barrier, Guido; in pauper's weeds I will follow thee to the end of the world.

GUIDO

[*Wildly.*] The world is not wide enough to hold us both. Fare thee well for ever.

BEATRICE

[*Calmly, with restrained passion.*] Why didst intrude into my life at all? Why sow in my tender heart the white flower of love?

GUIDO

Beatrice!

BEATRICE

Now thou art fain to tear it up root and branch, but every fibre holds my heart so fast, that, an thou breakest one, mine heart breaks too. Why didst come into my life? Why didst uncover the secret springs of my love, that long had been choked up? Ah, why?

GUIDO

Oh God!

BEATRICE

[*Wringing her hands.*] Why didst break open the sluices of passion, till, like the waters of a flooded river that sweep away with them meadows and woods, Love with the triumphant might of an avalanche did whirl away my life with it? Must I drop by drop gather up again those waters? Ah, me! a tear is formed of every drop, embittering my life with its salt savour.

GUIDO

Say no more, I do conjure thee, for I must needs leave thy life, to seek a way that is denied thee.

BEATRICE

I have heard tell that mariners, dying of thirst on a raft, wretched castaways on the wide seas, do dream of green meadows and rippling brooks, and then, their throats parched, awake to suffer yet more piteous torments, because sleep hath so deceived them; and so they die, cursing the sleep which did cradle them in dreams. I curse thee not, though I too have made shipwreck on the ocean men call despair.

GUIDO

Oh God, oh God!

BEATRICE

Ah, stay, stay, Guido; listen, I love thee. [*A short pause.*] Is there no echo, when I say I love thee, to sound back to me? Is it dead?

GUIDO

All, all is dead,—save only one thing, and that dies to-night.

BEATRICE

Then must I school my lips to parting; and yet, methinks they'll never learn the lesson, for when I shape them to cry farewell, naught will they

say but this: I love thee! Must I chide the rebels? But can one lip chide the other? Ah, both are guilty, and refuse to utter the fatal word.

GUIDO

Then must I say it for them. Farewell; never can we see each other more. [*Rushes towards her.*]

BEATRICE

Art going? Nay, touch me not,—go, I say, go! [*Exit Guido.*] Never again,—was that it, —never see each other again? Well, I know my duty. I will exchange the lamp of love for a funeral torch, lay my bridal wreath upon my bier, alter my wedding-march into a dirge, and so singing die, like the swan.

Oh grief, an thou art so enamoured of my life, why couldst not choose another form?—the mask of pain, not the smile of love, the raven's voice, not the nightingale's, the mole's blind eyes, not those sapphire orbs, that like the summer sky are so deep blue God would seem visible in them,— then, grief, then should I have known thee for what thou art.

Why in heaven's name spake he of a barrier?

No, there is no barrier raised betwixt us; he lied, and should I therefore shun henceforth what I have loved, and hate what I adored? We women live not after such a guise. For should I cut his image from my heart, my heart, in pilgrim wise, would follow bleeding after that image through the world and summon it back with the soft call of love.

[*Enter the Duke equipped for the chase with Falconers and dogs.*]

DUKE

You kept us waiting, and our dogs to boot.

BEATRICE

I do not hunt to-day.

DUKE

Why so?

BEATRICE

I cannot go, my lord.

DUKE

What, baby face, thou dar'st to cross my will? I could bind thee on a jade and chase thee through the streets, that the rabble,—the folk

thou feedest!—might wave their caps and scoff at thee.

BEATRICE

Hast never then a kindly word for me?

DUKE

With kindly words a man doth catch his enemies. Thee I hold within the hollow of my hand; why need I waste flattering speeches?

BEATRICE

I am not coming.

DUKE

[*Beating his boot with his riding whip.*] I have changed my mind. Thou art to remain at home, and like a devoted wife, mayst watch from the lattice for our return. 'Twere too terrible if any accident befell thy dear consort! Ho, Lords, come on, the dogs are hot-foot,—and I too, with so dutiful a wife beside me. Where is Childe Guido?

MAFFIO

My lord, I have not seen him for a full hour past.

DUKE

No matter, soon enow I shall get a sight of him. You, gracious lady, tarry soft at home and spin. I wager you my word, home-keeping virtues are oft very commendable,—in other folks.

[*Exit Duke with his train.*]

BEATRICE

The stars do fight against me, that is the sum of all. Wherefore will I this night, when my lord is asleep, make good use of my dagger and so end my days. My heart is like a stone that nothing scores save the dagger's edge. There let it find the name that lies hid within. To-night must death sever me from the Duke,—but yet he too, the old Duke, may die to-day. Why not? Yesterday his hand was stricken palsied; men have oft been slain by such a stroke,—and why not he? Are there not fever too and ague and fit, as mostly such accompany old age? Nay, nay, he dies not, he is too sinful. The honour-worthy die before their time. The good die,—beside whom, in the hideous pollution of his life, he is a leper. Women and children die; the Duke dies not, he is too sinful.

Can it be, that sin hath a sort of immortality,

unknown to virtue? Can it be that the bad man thrives on what to other mortals is death, like poisonous herbs that live from corruption? Nay, nay, God would never suffer that. Yet my lord dies not, he is too sinful. Wherefore 'tis I alone will die to-night. Grim death must so my bridegroom be, the grave my secret pleasure house of joy. A churchyard is the world, and like a coffin, each one doth carry a skeleton within.

[*Count Moranzone enters, all in black; he crosses the stage in the background, gazing about him anxiously.*]

MORANZONE

Guido? Where is he? nowhere can I find him.

BEATRICE

[*Perceiving him.*] Oh God! 'Twas thou didst take away my love from me.

MORANZONE

[*With flashing eyes.*] How, hath he forsaken thee?

BEATRICE

What! dost not know? Give him back to me,

oh, give him back to me; else will I have thy body torn limb from limb, and thy head nailed to the pillory, till the carrion vultures have flayed it bare. Better hadst thou crossed the lioness's path than come betwixt my love and me. [*With gathering passion.*] Oh, give him back, thou know'st not how I love him. But now he knelt on that seat, here stood, there gazed at me and kissed my wide open portals, dropt a song of love, so wild with hand and spoiled these lips with his, and in these ears, yearning that all around the birds fell silent. Give him back to me!

MORANZONE

He loves you not.

BEATRICE

The plague dry up thy tongue, that saith so! Give him back to me!

MORANZONE

You will never, noble lady, see him more, neither this night nor any other night.

BEATRICE

What is thy name?

MORANZONE

What is my name? — Revenge! [*Exit.*]

BEATRICE

Revenge! I have never harmed a little child; what seeks revenge then at my door? No matter, death stands ready there on watch, to light me with his gloomy torch. 'Tis true, men hate thee, Death, yet to me thou wilt be dearer than my best beloved. Send forth thy messengers then straightway, urge on the weary steeds of lagging day and hurry forward night, thy sister. Enwrap the world in black, and let thy parson, the owl, screech from his ruined tower, the toad croak, and the bat, slave of the dark Persephone, whir on fluttering pinions through the gloom. Tear up the shrieking mandrakes, that they make music for the dance, and bid the mole dig deep thy cold, narrow bed. For this night will I lie within thine arms.

ACT-DROP.

THIRD ACT.

SCENE—*A broad corridor in the Duke's Palace.*

To left, a window affording a view over Padua by moonlight. To right, a flight of steps leading to a door, before which hangs a curtain of crimson satin embroidered with the Ducal arms in gold. On the bottom step is seated a black-robed figure. The scene is lighted by an iron brazier in which tow is burning. Thunder and lightning. Night-time.

[*Guido climbs in by the window.*]

GUIDO

The storm grows fiercer; how my ladder swayed! At every shock methought the ropes had parted! [*Looks back at the city.*] Great God, what a night! In the skies the crash of

thunder, and wild lightnings that blaze through the town from pinnacle to pinnacle, till the pale houses tremble and seem to shudder each time another flash darts along the streets. [*Crosses stage to the foot of the steps.*] Ha, who art thou, that lurk'st on the stairs watching like Death for a guilty soul? [*A pause.*] Art dumb? Hath the storm paralysed thy tongue and benumbed thy speech? Out of the way; in yonder chamber have I work to accomplish, that no man else can do. [*The figure rises and removes its mask.*]

MORANZONE

Guido Ferranti! Thy dead father shouts with glad triumph this night!

GUIDO

[*Confused.*] What, are you here?

MORANZONE

I was waiting your coming.

GUIDO

[*Looking away from him.*] I did not expect you; yet am I glad I can now tell you mine intent.

MORANZONE

First would I inform thee of my plans! Know then, the horses stand ready at the Parma gate; once thou hast performed thine office, we ride thence away. To-morrow night, an our steeds prove trusty, we shall be at Parma. There are already warned the old-time friends of thy noble father, who have long been stirring up a revolt of the burghers. By dint of gold and empty promises I have won to our side many folk that now hold to the Duke, the usurper. Once the Duke is dead, the soldiery is soon induced to mutiny, and then thou mountest thy father's throne as lawful lord of Padua.

GUIDO

It cannot, cannot be.

MORANZONE

It shall be!

GUIDO

Now hear me, Count Moranzone, I am resolved not to kill the Duke.

MORANZONE

Say that again! Mine ears have cheated me,

eld hath numbed my powers. I am grown a grey-beard afore my time. What didst say? Thou would'st with the dagger in thy girdle revenge thy father's bloody murder. Didst thou say that?

GUIDO

No, I said, Sir Count, I was resolved not to kill the Duke.

MORANZONE

Impossible, my senses do deceive me; or the midnight storm-laden air changes thy meaning in the saying.

GUIDO

You hear aright; I will not kill the man.

MORANZONE

And what, traitor, of thine oath?

GUIDO

I am determined to break it!

MORANZONE

And what of thy father's murder?

GUIDO

Think you, my father would have joy, to see this old man's blood reeking on my hands?

MORANZONE

Yea, he would laugh for pleasure.

GUIDO

Not so — the other world hath better knowledge; vengeance is God's, leave it to God.

MORANZONE

Thou art God's instrument of vengeance.

GUIDO

Nay! God needs no instrument but his own hand. I will not kill the man.

MORANZONE

Wilt not! then why art thou here?

GUIDO

Count Moranzone, I will push into the Duke's chamber, to lay the dagger here on the sleeper's bosom, and this paper. When he awakes, he will learn in whose power he was, who spared his life; that is the fairest revenge for me.

MORANZONE

Thou wilt not slay him?

GUIDO

No!

MORANZONE

Ignoble scion of the noblest of fathers, who dost not begrudge another hour of life to the man who sold him.

GUIDO

You stayed my hand therefrom. Else had I killed him in the open market-place, the day first I saw him.

MORANZONE

'Twas not the time then; now the hour is come, and like a girl, thou pratest of mercy.

GUIDO

No, but of right revenge, such as beseems my father's son.

MORANZONE

Unhappy father, once more betrayed, and by your own son! Thou art a dastard; else draw thy steel, dash into the Duke's room, and bring

me back his black heart upon thy sword. Once he is dead, then thou may'st talk to me of noble vengeance.

GUIDO

Hear me! Upon your honour, upon your love toward my father's name, think you, my father, that puissant lord, that doughty hero, that knightly warrior, would e'er have crept in like a thief by night, and stabbed a greybeard in his bed? Speak!

MORANZONE

[*After some hesitation.*] Thou didst take an oath, and thou must keep it! Dost deem I know not thy secret, thy commerce with the Duchess?

GUIDO

Stop, thou liar! The moon herself is not so chaste, the stars not so pure.

MORANZONE

And yet thou lov'st her, weak fool, who usest love but only as a plaything!

GUIDO

Yea, thou dost well to talk; in thy veins, grey-

beard, youth stirs not stormily. Thy bleared eye hath barred its veiled gateway to beauty, thy ear is stopped, robbed of its erstwhile keenness, and shut to this world's music. Thou talk'st of love, and knowest not what love is.

MORANZONE

I too, young sir, have wandered moonstruck, have sworn, sick with yearning, to die, and died not; I too have nimbly rhymed of *loves* and *doves* in halting verses sung to a cracked guitar, as lovers use to do; I know the trick o't, mad lust of food and bed. . . . At bottom we all are beasts — love is mere sensuality under a holy name.

GUIDO

Now am I assured you know naught at all of Love. Love is life's sacrament; it hath magic to charm virtue out of naught, and purifies from all the nauseous refuse of this world. It is the fire that refines the gold from dross, the van that sifts chaff and wheat, the Spring that from the hard-frozen soil lets innocency put forth her rosebuds. God walks no more amongst mankind—his image, Love, goes in His stead. The man who loves a woman knoweth the secret as

well of the Creator as of the world created. There is no house so lowly, so poor and pitiful, that, if the indwellers be pure of heart, Love shuns the same; but an if bloody murder knock at the Palace gate, and find an entrance, then creeps Love wounded forth and dies. That is the penalty ordained of God for sin. The bad man cannot love. [*Groans are heard from the Duke's sleeping room.*] What is that? Do you not hear it?

MORANZONE

Nay, 'twas nothing.

GUIDO

I take this to be woman's mission,—through the power of Love to save man's soul; love for my Beatrice hath taught me to see a more sublime, more holy vengeance, an if I spare the Duke, than in any bloody deed of murderous midnight violence, — young hands choking out an old man's life. Was't not for Love's sake that Christ, who was himself Love incarnate, exhorted men to forgive their enemies?

MORANZONE

[*Scoffingly.*] That was in Palestine, not at

Padua — a saying coined for Saints. I have to deal with men.

GUIDO

'Tis for all times.

MORANZONE

Wherein is shown the Duchess's gratitude? Will she bend her cheek to thine, and fondle thee, because her consort can no more torture her?

GUIDO

Woe is me! never must I see her face more. Scarce twelve hours agone I took leave of her so abruptly, with such unruly passion, that she hath shut fast her heart against me. No, I shall never see her more.

MORANZONE

What art minded to do?

GUIDO

Once I have laid the dagger in its place, I leave Padua this very night.

MORANZONE

And then?

GUIDO

I go to enroll my name with the Doge of Venice, that he send me speedily to the wars to fight against the Heathen in the Holy Land; there will I, for my life is but a burden to me, throw myself recklessly upon some foeman's spear. [*Renewed groaning from the Duke's chamber.*] Hear you not someone crying?

MORANZONE

I hear continually from the dark purlieus of the grave one crying for vengeance. We waste time; the morn is near; art thou determined not to kill the Duke?

GUIDO

I am so resolved.

MORANZONE

Guido Ferranti, there in yonder room lies the man who erst sold your father and delivered him to the headsman's hands. There he sleeps; thou hast thy father's dagger; wilt thou not slay him?

GUIDO

I will not.

MORANZONE

Unhappy father, thou art left unavenged.

GUIDO

Unhappier yet were thy son a murderer.

MORANZONE

Pshaw, what is life?

GUIDO

I know not, Sir Count; I did not give it, and I dare not take it.

MORANZONE

Not oft have I thanked God so heartily as now, that he hath bestowed never a son on me! Why, what bastard blood then flows in thy veins, that, having thine enemy in thy power, thou let'st him escape! I would thou hadst tarried where thou wert.

GUIDO

Mayhap it had been better so. Mayhap the best of all, an I had never seen this world of sorrow!

MORANZONE

Farewell!

GUIDO

Farewell to you, Count Moranzone! One day the purport of my vengeance will be clear to you.

MORANZONE

Never.

[*Exit by the window, and down the rope-ladder.*]

GUIDO

Thou, father, knowest of mine intent and art content with this nobler vengeance. Whenas I grant the man his life, I ween I am doing as thou would'st have done thyself. I cannot tell, father, whether human voice can break through the iron prison of the dead, whether the departed have any tidings of what we do and leave undone for their sakes. And yet, methinks, I feel a presence near me, like a shadow by my side, and meseems as though spirit kisses touched my lips and left them sanctified. [*Kneels.*] Oh father, canst thou not break the laws of Death and show thyself in bodily shape, that I may grasp thy hand? Nay, nay, 'tis naught. [*Rises.*] It is the midnight

phantoms do befool us, the night deceives us like a puppet-showman, persuading us that what is not, is. 'Tis waxing late; I must now to my work. [*Draws a letter from his bosom and reads.*] When he awakes and sees this letter and dagger beside it, disgust will take hold of him for his life. Will he mayhap repent and reform his ways? Or will he mock, because a young wight hath spared him, his bitter enemy? 'Tis all one to me. Thy errand, father, it is that I fulfil,—thy orders and my love's, which hath taught me to know thee as thou art. [*Glides up the steps; just as he is stretching out his hand to draw back the curtain, the Duchess comes forward to meet him, all in white. Guido starts back.*] Beatrice?

BEATRICE

Guido, is it thou here, — so late at night?

GUIDO

Thou stainless angel of my life, thou comest surely from God with a heavenly message, — that 'tis nobler to practise mercy than revenge.

BEATRICE

For mercy I do beseech thee from my heart of hearts.

GUIDO

Oh father, now do I know thy will; for with Mercy hand in hand appeared Love like a God upon my path.

BEATRICE

I felt sure thou would'st come back again, when thou didst leave me so cruelly. Oh why didst do it? I make no quarrel, for now can I keep thee, feel thy heart's pulse throb soft and fearful against mine. We are a pair of cage birds, that kiss each other through the bars. — The time slips by, dawn will be here in an hour; get horses for the ride to Venice, there I am in no suspicion from them.

GUIDO

I follow thee, dearest, to the world's end.

BEATRICE

Nay, but dost love me verily?

GUIDO

Loves the lark the gray of dawn, that wakes its note?

BEATRICE

Can naught change thee?

GUIDO

Naught in this world. So sure as swings the mariner's needle, so turn I to the loadstone of thy love.

BEATRICE

No obstacle rises now betwixt us?

GUIDO

None now, nor in the future.

BEATRICE

That is *my* work.

GUIDO

Now wait till I do mine.

BEATRICE

Wilt thou go from me? leave me again as erst?

GUIDO

In one moment will I fare back. First I must haste into the Duke's chamber and leave this letter there, and this dagger with it,—that when he wakes. . . .

BEATRICE

Who wakes?

GUIDO

The Duke.

BEATRICE

He will never wake more.

GUIDO

Is he dead?

BEATRICE

Yea, he is dead.

GUIDO

Oh God, how wonderful are Thy ways! Could I e'er have thought that, this very night when I entrusted to Thy hands the vengeance that is Thine, Thou wouldst touch the man with Thy finger and summon him before Thy judgment-seat?

BEATRICE

I have just stabbed him. . . .

GUIDO

[*In horror.*] Oh!

BEATRICE

—in his sleep. Come nearer, beloved, let me

tell you all. Ere I begin, kiss me on the mouth. What! thou wilt not kiss me? Well, thou wilt, when thou hast learned how I slew him. Meseemed, after thou hadst left me in anger, that life was stale, unprofitable, without thy love. I had resolved to kill myself this night. About an hour agone, I woke, drew forth my dagger from beneath the pillow, where I had hid it with this intent, bared the blade and tried its sharpness, and thought of thee, how fondly I loved thee. The weapon was already aimed upon myself, when I turned mine eyes to the greybeard, ripe in years and wickedness, as he lay there, still muttering curses in his sleep. At sight of that hateful face a lightning flash shot through me suddenly: this is the barrier Guido spake of —whom else could he mean when he said *barrier* but him?—

What happened next, I scarce know. One thing only, that betwixt him and me a reeking mist of blood arose.

GUIDO

Horrible!

BEATRICE

Yea, well mightest thou call the sight I saw

horrible; there was a rain of gore, then he groaned grievously, and then the groaning died away. Then I only heard the blood drip, drip down on the floor.

GUIDO

Enough, enough.

BEATRICE

Wilt thou not kiss me now? Dost not remember what thou saidst,—that women's love makes angels of us men; well, man's love makes martyrs of poor women, who bear everything for his sake.

GUIDO

God!

BEATRICE

Thou hast naught to say?

GUIDO

Speech dies betwixt my lips.

BEATRICE

The Duke was slain with this steel. I never thought he would have bled so sore. Well, water may wash clean my hands, is't not so? But my

soul? Enough, enough! let us begone hence? Is not the barrier betwixt us fallen? What would'st thou more? Come now, the morn draws nigh. [*Lays her hand on Guido's.*]

GUIDO

[*Shrinking away from her.*] Lost Saint! Angel from hell! What bloody demon was it set thee on? That thou didst kill thy consort is naught,—Hell was already gaping for his soul, —but thou hast murdered Love along with him, and where Love was, is now but a bloody stain, that breathes forth reek of plague and pestilence, and chokes Love.

BEATRICE

[*In a sort of amazement.*] I did it for thee. Hadst thou so willed, I had never suffered it. *Thou* art to remain forsooth without spot or blemish, untouched, blameless, unsmirched! Men know not what women do for love's sake. Have I not destroyed my soul for all eternity?

Oh, be kind to me; I did it for thee.

GUIDO

Touch me not; there flows a slender stream of blood betwixt us, that yet can ne'er be bridged.

When thou didst stab thy husband, thou didst smite Love to the heart with the same blow. We must see each other no more.

BEATRICE

[*Wringing her hands.*] For thee! For thee! I did it for thee; canst forget that? Thou spakest of a barrier betwixt us twain; now the barrier lies in yon upper chamber, laid low, destroyed, shattered and overthrown,—it can divide us no more.

GUIDO

Thou didst misunderstand me, sin was the barrier, and thou hast set it up thyself; crime was the barrier, murder was the barrier, and thine own hand hath built it up so high it shuts out Heaven and God.

BEATRICE

I did it for thee, thou canst not, must not, forsake me. Guido, hear! See to getting horses, let us set forth to-night. What was is like an evil dream—forgotten, the future beckons us; are we not faring forth to find sweet days of love in the flowery meads? We will laugh; nay, then we will weep, if only we weep together,

thou and I; I will serve thee like a poor drudge, like any handmaid. I will be so humble, so full of lowliness; thou dost not know me!

GUIDO

Nay, I know thee now. Begone, begone, I say, from my sight!

BEATRICE

[*Pacing backwards and forwards.*] Ah God! how fondly I have loved this man!

GUIDO

Never! Else would Love have stayed thine arm, when thou didst sully his sanctuary, which only innocency may rightly enter.

BEATRICE

These are mere words, words, words.

GUIDO

Begone! How could we ever share the holy meal of love? Thou hast poured poison in the consecrated wine, murder dips his finger in the cup. I had liefer have borne a thousand deaths.

BEATRICE

Since I did the deed, I *have* borne a thousand deaths.

GUIDO

'Tis life, not death, thou hast to dread.

BEATRICE

[*Throwing herself upon her knees.*] Then strike me dead! I have poured forth blood, pour forth more yet, and heaven, or else hell, will greet us twain united. Draw thy sword, and quick make reckoning with Death, who yet licks his lips after this feast. Quick, quick, let thy sword pierce my heart, 'twill find there but the image of its lord. But an thou wilt not kill me with thy sword, then bid me fall upon this reeking knife, and I will do it.

GUIDO

[*Wresting the knife from her hand.*] Give it me, give it me, I say. Oh God! thy very hand is wet with blood. Hell is here, I can tarry no longer.

BEATRICE

Wilt thou not raise me up, or must I like a beggar grovel on my knees?

GUIDO

Let me never behold thy face again!

BEATRICE

Ah, well for me, had I never seen thee! But bethink thee, 'twas for thee I did it. [*Guido shrinks away; kneeling, she seizes his hands.*] Nay, Guido, grant me hearing for a brief space! Till thou camest to Padua, I lived indeed a lamentable life there, but free from thoughts of murder,—subject to the cruelty of my husband, obedient to his unrighteous wishes, as pure as any maid of noble lineage, that now would draw back shuddering from my touch. Then thou camest, Guido, and I heard from thy lips the first words of kindness I had ever listened to since I left France. What then! Thou camest hither, in thine ardent eyes I read the meaning of love, every word from thee rang like music in my numbed soul. Thou didst shine splendid, like the good Saint Michael in Santa Croce, the Church I used to pray in. Shall I ever go there to pray again? In thy bright, young face glowed the clear light of morning—and I loved thee, yet hid my love from thee. Thou didst pay court to me, didst kneel before me, as now I

kneel at thy feet. With sweet-sounding oaths thou didst vow love to me, and I trusted thee. I thought how that many women in the world, if they were wedded to this monster, fettered to him, like galley-slaves to a leper,—that many women would have assailed thee as temptresses. I did not see. I know, and I had done it, albeit I had not lain in the very dust before thee, thou wouldst have loved me unchangingly. [*Approaches him timidly after a pause.*] Whether thou dost understand me even now, I cannot tell, Guido; for thee I have committed the outrage, that hath chilled my young blood to ice, for thee, and thee alone. [*Stretching out her arms.*]

Wilt thou not speak to me? Love me a little; ah, my youth hath so lacked love, so yearned for friendship.

GUIDO

I dare not look upon thee; what thou cravest is too, too publicly infamous. Get thee gone to thy chamberwomen!

BEATRICE

Ha, ha! there speaks a man!—Hadst *thou* come to me with guilt-laden soul, a foul murder

thou hadst committèd not for love, but lucre, I would have sat me upon thy bed and watched by thee the livelong night, that remorse might not distil its poison in thine ear and drive sleep away. For the guilty man best merits love in his torment.

GUIDO

Where guilt is, love hath naught to seek.

BEATRICE

Where guilt is, ought not love to be? Oh God! how differently we women love from men. Many and many a woman lives here in Padua, that toils and moils and wears her fingers to the bone in hard work—the husband wastes the scanty week's wage in dissolute carouse, in the boisterous tavern, then staggers home late o' the Saturday night, to find his wife seated at the fireless hearth, lulling asleep her whimpering child. At that he starts beating his poor wife, because the child cries with hunger and the fire is black. Yet the wife loves him, rises up next morning, her face swollen with grief and marks of blows, and tidies the house, sets her work in trim, forces a smile and is but too glad if he beat her not before their child another time!—

That is a woman's love. [*Pause.*] Thou dost not speak. Oh be kind to me, while yet the summer of my life shines bright. Thou canst not drive me from thy side; whither am I to go, an if thou reject me? For thee this hand murdered life, for thee my soul hath undone itself beyond redemption.

GUIDO

Begone from my sight! The dead man is a spirit, and our love hovers like a spectre round its desert grave and wanders through this charnel-house, and weeps, because it was murdered when thy consort was slain. Dost not see that?

BEATRICE

I see this, that when men love, they give women scant, scant measure, but women give all they have, when *they* love. That is what I see now, Guido.

GUIDO

Away! Away! Awake thy dead to life, ere thou dar'st return.

BEATRICE

Ah, would to God I could awake the dead,

give back the glassy eye its power of vision, the tongue its erstwhile flow of words, the heart its life-pulse—but it cannot be. What's done is done; once dead, dead for aye; no more the fire warms, or the winter chills with all its snows. Something is flown; call him, no answer comes, —make jest, he laughs no more,—stab him, he never bleeds.

Would that I *could* awake him! Oh God, turn back thy sun a brief while, erase this night in the book of time and blot it out. Reverse the sun and let me be what an hour agone I was. Nay, nay, time stands not still for anything, the sun stays not his course, though remorse cry e'er so hoarsely. But thou, beloved, hast thou no word of pity more for me? Oh Guido, Guido, kiss me once again! Force me not to some desperate resolve! A woman waxes mad, when so entreated. Wilt thou not kiss me yet once more?

GUIDO

[*Holding up the knife.*] Nay, not till the blood is dried upon this steel, nor even then.

BEATRICE

How scant pity, Saviour, is for us women in

this rough world! Men do entice us to the abyss, and then desert us when we fall into it.

GUIDO

[*Wildly.*] Go, go to join thy dead!

BEATRICE

[*Going up the steps.*] Well then, I will go! May you one day find more pity than thou hast given me.

GUIDO

Let me find pity, when I do commit foul midnight murder.

BEATRICE

[*Descending three or four steps again.*] Murder thou saidst? Murder is an hungered and doth crave for more. Death, his twin brother, is not satisfied; but stalks shrieking through the house and will not be appeased till he have company. Tarry a while, Death, I will give thee a faithful servant to fare with thee. Stay shrieking, murder, thou shalt enjoy a full feast, till thou be satiate.

A storm will threaten this house before noon, so fearful that the white moon is already changed

to grey for very horror; a light wind sweeps moaning round the house, the stars above haste madly along their heavenly path, as if the night were melting in tears of fire for what the day brings with it. Oh weep, lamenting heaven! Weep thine eyes out! Though grief like a deluge drowned all the universe, till it became one ocean of bitter tears, yet were't not enough! [*A peal of thunder.*] Dost not understand? the heavens have mounted their artillery. Revenge is waked, and her sleuth hounds are let loose on the world. Who of us twain calls down the lightning on his head, let him beware the hurt that lurks within the forked levin's flame. [*A flash of lightning, followed by a peal of thunder.*]

GUIDO

Away! Away!

[*Exit the Duchess. As she raises the crimson door-curtain, she throws one last look back at Guido, without the latter showing any sign of relenting. Thunder again.*]

In ashes at my feet lies my life, love itself is slain. In its stead hath murder crept in on stealthy bloodstained feet. And she, she who

hath wrought the deed,—yet she loved me and did the outrage for my sake! Beatrice, Beatrice, come back!

[*Just as he is mounting the steps, the tread of soldiers is heard approaching.*] Ha, what is that? The gleam of torches and swift hurrying feet. God grant they do not seize her. [*The approaching sounds grow louder.*] Beatrice! there is still time for flight. Come down, come down! [*The Duchess's voice is heard from without.*]

BEATRICE

This way fled my husband's murderer.

[*Down the steps hurries a troop of soldiers. At first they do not see Guido, until the Duchess appears, surrounded by her attendants carrying torches, at the top of the stairs and points out where Guido stands. He is at once arrested. One of the men-at-arms snatches the knife from his hands and shows it to the Captain of the Watch.*]

ACT-DROP.

FOURTH ACT.

SCENE—*Hall of Justice.*

The lower part of the walls is hung with stamped grey velvet, the upper part painted red. Gilded symbolic figures support the roof, which is decorated with red stripes; frieze and skirting boards are grey. A canopy of white satin with gold flower pattern is erected for the Duchess. Below this, a long bench, draped with a red cloth, for the Judges. Below this again a table for the Clerks of the Court. Two soldiers stand either side of the Canopy, and two more guard the door. The citizens have some of them already entered, while others are still arriving and exchanging greetings. Two Ushers in violet uniforms keep order with long white wands.

FIRST BURGHER

Good morrow, neighbour Anthony.

SECOND BURGHER

Good morrow, neighbour Dominic.

THIRD BURGHER

'Tis a memorable day for Padua, eh?—the Duke is dead.

SECOND BURGHER

Let me tell thee this, neighbour Dominic, I have never lived a right day's life since the last Duke died—as true as I'm an honest man.

FIRST BURGHER

They'll examine him first, and then judge him, won't they, neighbour Anthony?

SECOND BURGHER

Nay, nay! else might disputes occur. First he'll be judged, that he may get his deserts, and then the examination will be held, so that no injustice is possible.

FIRST BURGHER

Well, well, 'twill go hard with his neck, there's no doubt o' that.

SECOND BURGHER

Yea, 'tis most impious wicked to spill the blood of a Duke.

FIRST BURGHER

A Duke must have blue blood i' his veins, eh?

SECOND BURGHER

As I look on't, our Duke's blood was black, like his black soul.

FIRST BURGHER

Have a care, neighbour Anthony, the Usher with the blue eyes hath marked thee.

SECOND BURGHER

For what I care, let him cast his blue eyes on me an he will; he can't knock me down with 'em.

THIRD BURGHER

What think ye specially of the young fellow who stuck his knife into the Duke?

SECOND BURGHER

'Twas well bred, well dispositioned, well looking lad,—and natheless a villain, for he hath killed the Duke.

THIRD BURGHER

He hath done't for the first time. Mayhap the law will give him extenuating circumstances, seeing 'tis a case of "first offense."

SECOND BURGHER

Yea truly, I never thought o' that. But then the Law is hard on every man.

USHER

Hold thy tongue, rascal!

SECOND BURGHER

What, am I thy mirror, that thou miscall'st me rascal?

FIRST BURGHER

Here comes one o' the Household. How now, Dame Lucia, what news from Court? How is't with thy poor mistress, the Duchess with the gentle face?

LUCIA

A fine day truly! a fine day o' calamity! Alackaday, what a day and what a calamity! This very year come Michaelmas, 'tis just nineteen year since I wedded my good man. Now we be at August, and the Duke is murdered; there's a notable coincidence for ye!

SECOND BURGHER

Ah, if 'tis a notable coincidence, mayhap the lad will not be done for. 'Gainst coincidences

is no law; at least I know o' none 'gainst incidents.

FIRST BURGHER

But how goes it with the Duchess?

LUCIA

I was sure some disaster was coming on the house; for six weeks past the cakes have all been burnt o' the one side, and only last Michaelmas eve a big moth, with wings, flew into the candle, so that of sheer fright I well nigh—

SECOND BURGHER

But tell us of the Duchess, good gossip; how doth she fare?

LUCIA

I' fegs, and 'tis high time ye asked news of her; the poor lady is near out of her wits. The whole night long she hath never closed an eye, but hath paced back and forth her chamber. I begged her to take somewhat, a whey-posset or a sup of aquavitæ, and get to bed, and not grudge a spell of sleep to her shattered nerves; but, "nay, nay," she answered, "I am afraid of dreaming!" What think ye of her word,—strange, is't not?

SECOND BURGHER

Great folks be something short of sense; Providence doth make it up to 'em in fine clothes.

LUCIA

Well, well, this is all I can say: God keep us from murder, so long as we live.

[*Moranzone enters hastily.*]

MORANZONE

Is the Duke dead?

SECOND BURGHER

His heart hath a knife stuck in't, and that can scarce be healthful for any man.

MORANZONE

Who is accused of the murder?

SECOND BURGHER

The prisoner, Sir.

MORANZONE

Who is the prisoner?

SECOND BURGHER

Why, the man they do accuse of having murdered the Duke.

MORANZONE

I mean, what is his name?

SECOND BURGHER

Why, just whatever his god-fathers baptised him by? what could it be else?

USHER

Guido Ferranti is his name, noble sir.

MORANZONE

Yea, I knew it almost before you told me. [*Aside.*] 'Tis strange he should have killed the Duke, seeing he left me in so different a mind. Methinks, when he looked on the man, the fiendish bewrayer of his father, then passionate anger drew from out his heart all his boyish love-lore and planted revenge there instead. But I wonder he escaped not. [*Mingling again with the crowd.*] Say, how was he seized?

THIRD BURGHER

Why surely, by the forelock, Sir.

MORANZONE

I mean, who seized him?

THIRD BURGHER

Why verily, they who arrested him.

MORANZONE

Who raised the alarm?

THIRD BURGHER

That I cannot tell you, Sir.

LUCIA

The Duchess herself denounced him.

MORANZONE

[*Aside.*] The Duchess! That hath an ugly sound.

LUCIA

Of course! The dagger was still in his hand —the Duchess's dagger.

MORANZONE

What say you?

LUCIA

With the Duchess's dagger was my Lord Duke slain.

MORANZONE

[*Aside.*] Some mystery lurks behind all this, that I cannot fathom.

SECOND BURGHER

They tarry long ere they come into Court.

FIRST BURGHER

They will come soon enow, I trow, for the prisoner.

USHER

Silence! silence there!

FIRST BURGHER

Dost break the silence thine own self, Sir Usher, ordering us to keep it.

[*The President of the Court and the Judges enter.*]

SECOND BURGHER

Who is yonder fellow in scarlet? Is't the headsman?

THIRD BURGHER

Nay, that is the Chief Justiciar.

[*Guido is brought in under guard.*]

SECOND BURGHER

There comes the prisoner for sure.

THIRD BURGHER

He looks a likely lad enow.

FIRST BURGHER

Ay; but that is all his wiliness; scoundrels nowadays do look so respectable, that respectable folk, an they would be different from 'em, must needs look like scoundrels.

[*The headsman enters, and takes his place behind Guido.*]

SECOND BURGHER

Here comes the headsman! By'r Lord—think ye the axe is sharp?

FIRST BURGHER

Yea, a deal sharper than thy wits; but the edge is not turned toward him, mark ye that, neighbours?

SECOND BURGHER

[*Scratching his neck.*] 'Pon my word, I had liefer 'twere not quite so nigh.

FIRST BURGHER

Pshaw, needst have no fear, man; us common folk they never behead, but just set us a-swing at end of a rope. [*Fanfare of trumpets without.*]

THIRD BURGHER

What mean the trumpets? Is the sitting over already?

FIRST BURGHER

Nay, that doth mean the Duchess.

[*Enter the Duchess in black velvet; her train of flowered black velvet is borne by pages clad in violet. With her enter the Cardinal in scarlet robes and the Gentlemen of the Court in black. She takes her place on the throne above the Judges' bench; the latter rise and remove their caps at her entrance. The Cardinal sits beside the Duchess, but on a slightly lower level. The Courtiers group themselves about the throne.*]

SECOND BURGHER

The poor Duchess, how white she looks! Is she going to sit on the throne?

FIRST BURGHER

Yea, now she doth take the Duke's place.

SECOND BURGHER

'Tis a right good thing for Padua; the Duchess is a kind-hearted, merciful Lady—once she cured my child of a fever.

THIRD BURGHER

Yea, and more than that; she hath given us bread. That should not be forgot to her credit.

A SOLDIER

Stand back there, good folk!

SECOND BURGHER

Why need we to stand back, if we be good folk?

USHER

Silence in the court!

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

With your Grace's leave, an it please you, we will deal with the Duke's murder. [*The Duchess bows assent.*] Let the prisoner step forward! What is thy name?

GUIDO

What matters that, my Lord?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Guido Ferranti they call thee in Padua.

GUIDO

A man can die under that name as well as another.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

'Tis well known to thee what awful crime they charge thee with,—most traitorous murder done on our Duke, Simone Gesso, Lord of Padua. What defence hast thou to offer?

GUIDO

None.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Then dost thou make confession of guilt?

GUIDO

Nay, I do confess naught, and I deny naught. I pray you, worshipful sir, proceed as fast as e'er the use of justice and the law permit. I will render no explanations.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Then canst thou not be guiltless of the murder; rather hath thy hardened, contumacious

heart shut fast its gates against the right. Never think thy silence will avail thee; on the contrary it doth but magnify thy guilt, whereof we have been all along fully convinced. Now once more, I bid thee speak.

GUIDO

I will not speak.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Then naught is left for me to do but speedily to pronounce on thee the doom of death.

GUIDO

I beseech you, say out your judgment quick. You can confer on me no more longed for boon.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

[*Rising.*] Guido Ferranti—

MORANZONE

[*Advancing from among the crowd.*] Stay, stay, Sir Justiciar!

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Who art thou that bidst justice stay?

MORANZONE

An it be justice, let it take its course; but an it be not—

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Who is this?

BARDI

A Noble, and well known to our whilome Duke.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Well, Sir, you have come opportunely to be satisfied anent our Duke's murder. There stands the man who did the hideous deed.

MORANZONE

Hath mere suspicion fastened blindly on him, or have you proofs he was the man?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Thrice over hath the Court summoned him to say his say; but guilt lies heavy on his tongue, for not a word doth he advance in vindication, nor seeks to clear himself of blame, which surely innocence would have done.

MORANZONE

A second time I ask the question,—have you proofs?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

[*Showing the dagger.*] This dagger, which the soldiers last night tore all bloody from his blood-stained hands. Need we better proof?

MORANZONE

[*Takes the dagger and approaches the Duchess.*] Have I not seen a dagger much like this hanging at your Grace's girdle? [*The Duchess shudders, but without answering.*] Let me converse with this youth, who is in such peril of his life, for a few moments.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

With much pleasure, Sir! And may you bring him to a frame of mind when he will unburden his heart of its load of guilt. [*Moranzone goes over to Guido, and takes his hand.*]

MORANZONE

[*Whispers.*] She did it! I could see it in her eyes! Canst think that I should suffer thy father's son to be dragged to the scaffold by this

woman? Even as her Consort sold thy father, will she now do with thee.

GUIDO

Count Moranzone, I did it, and I alone. You may rest content, my father is avenged.

MORANZONE

Enough, enough, I know thou didst not do it; else had thy father's dagger, not this woman's plaything, fulfilled the work. Look, how she gazes at us! By God, the marble mask shall down; before all the world will I arraign her for this murder.

GUIDO

You must never do so.

MORANZONE

Be sure of this, I will.

GUIDO

Better say no word of it, my Lord.

MORANZONE

Why not? An she be guiltless, she can prove it; if guilty, she must die.

GUIDO

And what am I to do?

MORANZONE

Thou or I—one of us twain is to tell the truth here and now.

GUIDO

The truth is,—I did the deed.

MORANZONE

We will see what our good Duchess answers.

GUIDO

Nay, I will tell all right out.

MORANZONE

'Tis well said, Guido. On her own head fall the consequences of her outrage, not on thine! Did she not deliver thee to the guard?

GUIDO

Yea, she did.

MORANZONE

Well then, avenge thy father's death on her! She was wife of the false Judas!

GUIDO

Yea, she was!

MORANZONE

Now, methinks, no further urging is needed, albeit yesterday thou wast childishly discouraged and faint-hearted.

GUIDO

Faint-hearted though I was yesterday, I will no more be so to-day, be sure of that.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Doth he confess?

GUIDO

My Lord, I will confess,—that a cruel murder hath been committed.

FIRST BURGHER

Now, look at that; he hath a gentle heart and will know naught o' murder; so they will let him go free anon.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

And that is all?

GUIDO

Nay, I say more than that,—I say, the man doth mortal sin who sheds man's blood.

SECOND BURGHER

He should go say that to the headsman; 'tis a good word.

GUIDO

Last boon of all, I do beseech the Court to grant me leave frankly to expound the riddle of the murder, lighten this darkness, and name the guilty one who yesternight slew the Duke with this dagger.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

The boon is granted.

BEATRICE

[*Rising.*] Nay, nay, he must not speak; need we any further proofs? Was he not seized at night within the Palace in the bloody garb of guilt?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

[*Showing her the Code.*] Your Grace may look yourself how the Law doth stand.

BEATRICE

[*Pushing the book away.*] Bethink you, Sir Justiciar, is it not most likely a man of his sort might here in the presence of all the people defame and vilify my late Consort, the City, the City's honour, mayhap even mine own self?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

But the Law, your Grace!

BEATRICE

He must not speak; but with a gag in his mouth climb the ladder to the headsman's block.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

But the Law!

BEATRICE

No Law binds us, 'tis we bind others by the Law.

MORANZONE

Sir Justiciar, you will never suffer such injustice here.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Nay, spare your reproaches, Count Moranzone. 'Twere sure a bad ensample, noble Lady, to

turn away the Law from the right path; by such arbitrary power anarchy might well creep in to disturb our golden-balanced mean, and wrong win unrighteous victory.

BARDI

Your Grace cannot hinder the course of Justice.

BEATRICE

You preach of Justice and brag of the Law! Methinks, ye proud lords of Padua, the man who hurts your goods or pockets, who would but minish your monstrous incomings by the worth of one poor ferry toll, you would be far enow from giving *him* the benefit of the tardy Law's delay, with the same gentle patience ye do recommend to me.

BARDI

Your Grace doth wrong the Nobles.

BEATRICE

Nay, methinks I do not. Which of you all, an he found a thief at night in his house, stowing away some worthless trash amid his rags, would enter on discussions, and not call in a

constable out of hand, to hale him straight to gaol?

So would ye, finding the villain with my husband's blood upon his hands, have haled him before his judge, that his head might be struck off.

GUIDO

God!

BEATRICE

Sir Justiciar, speak!

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

It may not be, your Grace. The laws of Padua are strict upon the point: even a common murderer hath the right thereafter to plead his case with his own mouth.

MORANZONE

Oh righteous Judge! Oh righteous law!

BEATRICE

Now are ye making triumph all too soon with your Law and Right! This is no ordinary, base-born murderer, Justiciar, but a bold outlaw, a traitor to the State, caught in open rebellion. The man who murders the Ruler of the State,

murders the State as well, doth make all women widows, and all children orphans; so is he the public enemy of the State, as much as though he came with menacing artillery, in league with the hostile levies of Venice, and rattled at the gates of our Stronghold. Nay, more perilous is he to the State than serried spears and thundering cannon; for walls, gates, battlements, bastions, and all such things as are wrought of mere brute wood and stone, can be built up anew. But who can raise up again the body of my dead Consort, and bid him live and laugh?

MAFFIO

By Saint Paul, they will surely, I ween, forbid him the right to speak.

JEPPO

Yea, she hath gotten him fast hand and foot. But listen what more she hath to say.

BEATRICE

Wherefore bestrew ye now Padua's head with ashes, hang mourning banners out in all her streets, let every citizen go clad in sober black, —but ere we make us ready for the funeral feast, we must bethink us of the accursed murderer's

hand, that hath wrought ruin on our State. Away with him straight to yon narrow house, whence no sound returns, where with a pinch of dust Death stops the lying mouths of men.

GUIDO

Let go there, constables. Hear me, Justiciar! Thou canst as little check the fetterless Ocean, the winter whirlwind, the Alpine hurricane, as silence me. Yea, should your soldiers drive their swords into my throat, yet shall each wound's gaping mouth with furious tongue cry out to Heaven.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Violence of this sort doth naught avail; so long as the tribunal grants thee not legitimate authority of free speech, thy words be but spoken to the winds. [*The Duchess smiles, Guido falls back with a despairing look.*]

Now, your Grace, I and these wise Justicers do propose with your good leave to withdraw us into another chamber, and there consider this hard case of law, and examine statutes and precedents.

BEATRICE

Go, worthy Justiciar, search the statute well, and be not at the beck and call of the slandering knave.

MORANZONE

Go, worthy Justiciar, search your own conscience, and send no man to death unheard.

[*Exeunt Chief Justiciar and colleagues.*]

BEATRICE

Hold thy peace, thou evil genius of my life; for the second time thou com'st betwixt us. This time, I ween, Sir, 'tis my turn.

GUIDO

I will not die till I have spoken out.

BEATRICE

Die, and take thy secret along with thee to the grave!

GUIDO

Art still that same Duchess of Padua?

BEATRICE

I am what thou hast made me; look and see, I am thy creature.

MAFFIO

Look'ye, is she not like the white tigress at Venice an Indian Sultan once sent the Doge?

JEPPO

Hist, she can hear thy babble.

EXECUTIONER

My lad, I know not what thy speaking can effect, now mine axe is coming so nigh thy neck; no words can blunt its edge. But seeing it doth concern thee so nearly, I will hie me yonder to the Churchman; the commoner folks aye call him hither. I know of a surety, he hath a kind heart.

GUIDO

He whose trade is death is courtlier than all the rest.

EXECUTIONER

God have mercy on thee, I do thee the last service on earth.

GUIDO

Sir Cardinal, in a Christian land, where the pitying face of the Redeemer looks down from the high seat of justice, shall a human being die

without confession? If not, then let me reveal the nightmare of my sins, so far as sin doth burden my soul.

BEATRICE

A needless waste of time.

CARDINAL

Ah, my son, I have no influence over the Justiciar. *Mine* office only begins when doom hath been pronounced, to stir the wavering sinner to repentance, that he may whisper in the ear of Holy Church the secrets of a sin-laden heart.

BEATRICE

As much as e'er thou wilt, may'st speak at the confessional, till thy lips be outwearied, but here thou shalt not so.

GUIDO

Reverend Father, you do bring me but weak consolation.

CARDINAL

Nay, my son, the strong power of the Church doth not end with this poor soap-bubble world, whereof we, saith St. Jerome, are but dust—for,

an the sinner die repentant, prayer and our holy masses may do much to rescue his soul from Purgatory.

BEATRICE

An thou dost meet my husband in Purgatory with a blood-red star over his heart, tell him I send you to bear him company.

GUIDO

Oh God!

MORANZONE

This is the woman thou didst love, is't not?

CARDINAL

How cruel is Your Grace toward this man!

BEATRICE

Not half so cruel as he was to *your* Grace.

CARDINAL

Yea truly, he did to death your Consort.

BEATRICE

He did indeed!

CARDINAL

But mercy is the noblest prerogative of Princes.

BEATRICE

I found no mercy, and I give none. . . . He hath turned my heart into a stone, sowed nettle spawn in the flowering mead, poisoned the well-spring of compassion in my heart, and torn up loving-kindness by the roots; my life is like a land of famine, wherefrom all good things are utterly digged up. I am what thou hast made me. [*The Duchess weeps.*]

JEPPO

Strange she should so have loved the wicked Duke.

MAFFIO

Strange 'tis women love their mates, and strange it is they love them not.

JEPPO

What a philosopher art thou, Petrucci!

MAFFIO

Why yes, I can bear with equanimity the ill-luck of other folks,—and that is philosophy.

BEATRICE

They tarry long, the greybeards, in debate, bid them come, bid them come quick, else my heart will burst, so fiercely doth it beat; not that I am so exceeding anxious to live, for God wot, my life is not so joyful,—but at any rate I fain would not die without companions, nor fare alone to hell.

Sir Cardinal, canst not here on my brow read a word writ in scarlet letters,—the word "Revenge." . . . Bring water that I wash it out; it was branded there yesternight—say, must I wear it there by day, Cardinal? Oh, how it burns, and doth consume my brain! Give me a knife,—no, not that one, another,—that I may cut it out.

CARDINAL

It is but natural to rage against the murderous hand of the malefactor who struck dead your husband in his sleep.

BEATRICE

Ah, Cardinal, would I could burn that hand off,—it will burn in the world to come.

CARDINAL

Our Holy Church bids us forgive our enemies.

BEATRICE

Forgive? what is that? there was no forgiveness ever for me. Ha, they come at last. Well, Sir Justiciar, well?

[*The Chief Justiciar enters.*]

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Revered and most exalted our Liege Lady, long have we examined the knotty point, and well pondered Your Grace's words of wisdom,—never wisdom spake from fairer lips.

BEATRICE

Get on, my Lord, and let be compliments!

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

We find, as duly demonstrated to Your Grace, that whosoever, whether by force or fraud, doth conspire against the person of the Prince, is *ipso facto* outlawed and void of all rights which appertain to other men, is a traitor and an enemy of the people, whom any sword may slay at will, without its wielder being called into account; but an if he be brought before the judgment

seat, he must with dumb lips and all humility submit him to his well-deserved fate, seeing he hath forfeited the right of free speech.

BEATRICE

I thank thee from my heart, your law doth please me well. And so, I beg, finish with the assassin, as is meet for him; for I am weary of waiting, and the headsman is weary too. What, is there aught more?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Yea, Your Grace, one thing more. The man is a foreigner, no Paduan, and owes no fealty to our Duke, more than Nature claims of everyone. He may be accused of manifold treason, whereof the penalty is certain death, yet hath he right of free speech in open session 'fore the people; nay, the Court will urgently call on him, in accord with proper precedent, to defend his life, to the end his City may not, justly incensed, charge unjust judgment 'gainst our State, whereby a War might well be brought upon us. So ruthful are Padua's laws toward the stranger that sojourneth within her walls!

BEATRICE

Is he, as a member of our Household, a stranger in the city?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Only when he hath served seven years here, can he become a citizen of Padua.

GUIDO

I thank thee from my heart, your law doth please me well.

SECOND BURGHER

Law, I like not Law; an there were no Law, would be no transgressors o' the Law, and folk would live virtuous.

FIRST BURGHER

Yea, verily, that is a wise word, it carries a man far.

USHER

Yea, to the gallows, rascal!

BEATRICE

Is this the law?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Verily 'tis the Law of the Land, noble Lady.

BEATRICE

Show me the book; yea, there it stands in blood-red characters.

JEPPO

Look at our Duchess!

BEATRICE

Accursed law, ah, could I but tear thee from the code of state, as now I tear thee from this book. [*Tears the leaf out.*] Count Bardi, prithee, a word! Are you loyal? Then get me a horse, have it in waiting at my door, for I must ride in hot haste to Venice.

BARDI

You are for Venice, Duchess?

BEATRICE

Say naught of it! Go, go speedily.

[*Exit Bardi.*]

A word more, Sir Justiciar. If, as thou say'st, this is law in Padua,—and of the rightness of thy judgment I raise no doubt, albeit right in

such a case is bitter wrong,—yet can I not, by virtue of mine office, adjourn this trial to a later time?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

A blood process can never be postponed.

BEATRICE

I will not stay to hearken to the fellow insulting me with his rough answers. Beside, all important duties do await at the Palace. Attend me, gentlemen!

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Noble Lady, you may not depart hence, until the accused is condemned or acquitted.

BEATRICE

May not, Sir Justiciar! Pray, by what right dost put obstacles in my way? Am I not Mistress here in Padua, Liege Lady of the State?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

On this ground,—seeing you are source and fount of life and eke of death, wherefrom Right doth flow like a mighty river, Right is dried up, an you be not present, and hath no proper existence; therefore must you remain.

BEATRICE

Thou wouldst keep me here against my will.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Let not your will go against the Law.

BEATRICE

And if I force my way from out the Court?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

You cannot force the Justicers to clear the way.

BEATRICE

I will not stay. [*Rises from her seat.*]

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Is the Doorkeeper there? Let him step forward. [*Doorkeeper comes forward.*] Thou knowest what doth belong to thine office! [*The Doorkeeper shuts the doors of the Hall of Justice, which are to left of stage, and kneels down, as the Duchess and her train approach.*]

DOORKEEPER

In all humility I do beseech Your Grace, let not the doing of my duty become discourtesy, my unwelcome office be made a grievous burden. By virtue of the right that maketh you a

Princess I stand here; were I to break the law, Your Grace, I should be breaking your commandment and not my own.

BEATRICE

Is none amongst you, most honourable Sirs, will toss this prating windbag from my path?

MAFFIO

[*Drawing his sword.*] I will!

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Count Maffio, be heedful what you do, [*to Jeppo*] and you too, my Lord; the first man that draws his sword, were't only against a constable, dies before night.

BEATRICE

Put up your swords, gentlemen; I am resolved to hear the man. [*Goes back to the throne.*]

MAFFIO

Well, thou hast got thine enemy in thy clutches now.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

[*Taking up the hour-glass.*] Guido Ferranti, whiles here the sand runs in this hour-glass, 'tis allowed thee to speak freely, but no longer.

GUIDO

It is long enow.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Thou standest at the very extremest verge of death; by thy salvation, speak only the plain, undiluted truth. Naught else will stead thee.

GUIDO

An I speak untruth, deliver thou my body to the headsman.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

[*Turning the hour-glass.*] Silence all, whiles the prisoner speaks.

USHER

Ho there, silence in the Court!

GUIDO

My Lord Justiciar, revered Judge of this high Court, scarce know I how to begin what I have to say, so strange and horrible seems the tale to me. First, let me declare mine origin and birth. I am the bold Lorenzo's son, the Duke, who with hideous treachery was bewrayed by a villain,—whilome Duke in this same town of Padua.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Beware, 'twill help thee naught to defame the Prince who now lies in his coffin.

MAFFIO

By Saint James, why he is hereditary Lord then of Parma.

JEPPO

I aye took him to be noble born.

GUIDO

I do confess that, with a view to righteous revenge, most righteous revenge upon a murderer, I took service at the Duke's Court, sat with him at meat, drank of his wine and was his boon-companion; so much I do confess,—only this further, that I held my hand till he gave into my keeping the dearest secrets of his life, till he clung to me and in all ways trusted me, as once my noble father trusted him. I held my hand until—[*To the headsman.*] Thou man of blood, turn not thine axe toward me before the time; who knows whether my death-hour be really come. Is mine the only neck among folk present here?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Swift runs the sand in the hour-glass, be quick and tell us of the Duke's murder.

GUIDO

To be brief: yesternight 'twas midnight when I scaled the Palace walls with a stout rope, bent on avenging my father's murderer; such was my purpose, I do own it, Sir. Thus much will I confess, and this to boot: when cautiously I had climbed the steps that lead to the Duke's sleeping-room, and was stretching forth my hand to the scarlet curtain, that shook and shuddered in the storm, just then the white moon shone out in the sky and flooded the dark chamber with a silver sheen, the night lit up its tapers for my service. Asleep lay the hated Duke, still cursing in his dreams, and at the thought of my father's slaying,—my father whom he bartered to the block, sold to the scaffold, I pierced the traitor's heart with this dagger here, which by mere chance I found there in the room.

BEATRICE

[*Springing up.*] Oh!

GUIDO

[*Speaking fast and excitedly.*] I stabbed the Duke. Now, Justiciar, an I may yet crave one boon, let me see the sun never more, when he shines upon the misery of this sorrowful world.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR

Thy wish be granted thee. Die to-night! Lead him forth! Come ye with me, Sirs!

[*Guido is led off; as he goes, the Duchess throws wide her arms and rushes across the stage towards him.*]

BEATRICE

Guido! Guido! [*Falls in a swoon.*]

ACT-DROP.

FIFTH ACT.

SCENE—*A Dungeon in the State Prison at Padua.*

Guido lies (left) on a camp bed; beside him a table and on it a beaker. Five soldiers are drinking and dicing at a stone table in the corner; one of them has a lantern hanging from his halberd. A torch is stuck in the wall, above Guido's head. In background two barred windows, and between them (middle) the door, all opening onto a passage without. Stage dimly lighted.

FIRST SOLDIER

[*Throwing the dice.*] Six, six again, Pietro lad!

SECOND SOLDIER

Deuce and all, Lieutenant, I'll play no more with thee; else shall I lose all I have.

THIRD SOLDIER

All but thy wits; need'st have no fear about them.

SECOND SOLDIER

He can't rob me of my wits.

THIRD SOLDIER

Nay, because thou hast none to lose.

SOLDIERS

[*Laughing loudly.*] Ha! ha! ha!

FIRST SOLDIER

Hist, ye will wake the prisoner, he's asleep.

SECOND SOLDIER

What matter? He'll sleep long and sound enow, once he's buried. My word on't, he'd be glad if only we *could* wake him, when he's laid i' the grave.

THIRD SOLDIER

Not he, for when he wakes up there, 'tis the last day come.

SECOND SOLDIER

Yea, he hath brought himself to a pretty pass truly; why, let me tell ye,—to kill one of us,

who be mere flesh and blood, is against orders, but to slay a Duke, that is against the laws.

FIRST SOLDIER

But he was a cursed bad Duke.

SECOND SOLDIER

Then should he have had no truck with him; the man who goes with bad folk, runs risk of being fouled with their badness.

THIRD SOLDIER

Why, o' course he doth. How old is the prisoner?

SECOND SOLDIER

Old enow to commit follies, and not old enow to be wise and sensible.

FIRST SOLDIER

He can be any age at that rate.

SECOND SOLDIER

They say the Duchess would fain reprieve him.

FIRST SOLDIER

Truly?

SECOND SOLDIER

Yea, it seems she appealed to the Chief Justiciar, but he refused.

FIRST SOLDIER

But I alway thought, Pietro, the Duchess could do anything.

SECOND SOLDIER

For sure,—why, look'ye how she's made; I don't know a finer woman.

SOLDIERS

Ha! ha! ha!

FIRST SOLDIER

I meant that our Duchess could order anything and have it done.

SECOND SOLDIER

Not so; for now he's delivered up to his Judges, and they will take good care to see him executed, they and Big Hugo, the headsman. But once his head's off, then the Duchess can pardon him, an it suits her fancy; there's no law to hinder that.

FIRST SOLDIER

I don't suppose after all that Big Hugo, as ye

call him, when the last comes to the last, will get the chanee to do his duty on him; this Guido comes of a noble house, so the laws allow him to take poison, an such be his pleasure.

THIRD SOLDIER

'Pon honour, drinking poison is a sorry sort o' pleasure.

SECOND SOLDIER

What kind o' a thing is this poison, eh?

FIRST SOLDIER

Why, poison, man, that kills ye dead.

SECOND SOLDIER

What sort o' thing is't exactly, poison?

FIRST SOLDIER

A drink, like water, only not quite so wholesome. Would'st like to taste and try, there's some i' the beaker yonder.

SECOND SOLDIER

'Zounds, an it be not wholesome, I'll not touch it.

THIRD SOLDIER

Now, an he won't drink it?

FIRST SOLDIER

Then they'll put him to death.

THIRD SOLDIER

But an he do drink it?

FIRST SOLDIER

Then will he die.

SECOND SOLDIER

A damned poor choice for him; well, 'tis to be hoped he'll make a wise one.

[*Knocking heard at the door.*]

FIRST SOLDIER

Go see, who 'tis.

[*Third soldier goes and looks through the judas.*]

THIRD SOLDIER

A woman.

FIRST SOLDIER

Is she a trim wench?

THIRD SOLDIER

I can't see, Lieutenant, she wears a mask.

FIRST SOLDIER

Only right fair or downright ugly women hide their faces. Let her come in! [*The soldier opens the door and the Duchess enters, masked and cloaked.*]

BEATRICE

[*To the third soldier.*] Are you the Officer on guard?

FIRST SOLDIER

[*Stepping forward.*] I am, noble Lady.

BEATRICE

I must speak alone with the prisoner.

FIRST SOLDIER

Alas! that is impossible. [*The Duchess hands him a ring, he looks at it and returns it with a bow; then orders the men*] Withdraw!

[*Exeunt the other soldiers.*]

BEATRICE

Your men are a trifle rough, Sir Officer.

FIRST SOLDIER

They mean no harm.

BEATRICE

In a few minutes I shall be coming again; as I go down the corridor, see they do not lift my mask.

FIRST SOLDIER

You need have no fear, noble Lady.

BEATRICE

I have especial reasons for wishing no one to see my face.

FIRST SOLDIER

With this ring, noble Lady, you may go in and out at your good pleasure; 'tis the Duchess's ring.

BEATRICE

Now leave us alone. [*Just as the Officer is on the point of going*] One moment more. For what hour is the execution fixed?

FIRST SOLDIER

At twelve o'clock, noble Lady, we are to lead him forth according to orders, but he will scarce surely wait for us; in all likelihood he will take a sip of the poison before then. Men are sore afraid of the headsman.

BEATRICE

Is that poison there?

FIRST SOLDIER

Yea, noble Lady, very powerful poison.

BEATRICE

Now, prithee go.

FIRST SOLDIER

'Zounds, what a lovely hand! Who may she be, I wonder? Mayhap a woman who hath loved him. [*Exit.*]

BEATRICE

[*Removing her mask.*] At last! Now can he easily escape, cloaked and masked; we are almost of a size, no one will recognise him. Mine own fate I care little for. So long as he doth not curse me, albeit he forsake me, all is well; but will he curse me? he hath every right to. 'Tis eleven now, they come not ere twelve; what will they say, when they see the nest empty? [*Walks to the table.*] So that is poison. How wonderful that here in this liquor lies the key of all life's wisdom! [*Takes up the beaker.*] It smells of poppies; how well do I remember, when I was a

child in Sicily, I plucked a wealth of scarlet poppies in the corn, and wove a garland of them; even mine uncle, the grim John of Naples, laughed. I knew not that poppy juice can choke the source of life, can stop its pulse and freeze the blood, till men come and hale off the poor corpse and cast it in the grave,—yea, the dead body, but the soul fares either to heaven or hell. Whither will mine go?

[*Takes the torch from the wall, and goes up to the pallet bed.*]

How soft he sleeps, like a boy outwearied with play. Ah, would that I could sleep so peacefully, but I dream dreams. [*Bending over him.*] Poor lad, shall I kiss him? No, my lips would scorch him, sick and sorry as he is of love. But his white neck shall surely 'scape the headsman; that I have provided for. This night he shall fly from Padua,—and therefore I am glad. You are right cunning, Sir Justiciar, but you are not half so cunning as I,—and therefore I am glad. Oh God, how I loved him, and what a bloody flower hath blossomed therefrom. [*Returns to the table.*] Now, shall I drink this liquor, and so make an end? Were it not better to wait till Death come and find me in my bed with his

horrid following,—remorse, disease, eld and affliction? I know not an there be much pain to suffer. . . . I am so young, so young, to go to my death now, yet it must needs be so. But why? why die? To-night he doth escape, so that his blood falls not upon my head. Nay, nay, I must die; I am laden with guilt, and therefore must I die; he loves me not, and therefore must I die; I had died happier, an he had kissed me, but that he will not do. Little I knew him! I deemed he would have denounced me to the Judge; we women never know our dearest, till they forsake us.

[*Bell begins to toll.*] Hateful bell, why dost thou cry like a brazen-mouthed bloodhound hungering after his life; hush, thou dost cry in vain. He stirs,—quick! [*Seizes the beaker.*] Oh love, love, love, I never thought to pledge thee so.

[*Drinks the poison and puts down the beaker behind her on the table. The noise awakens Guido; he starts up, but does not see what she has done. Silence reigns for a minute, while they gaze at each other.*]

I am not come to crave for pardon now, I know I stand outside of all forgiveness, a guilty,

an accursed woman! Enough! I have confessed already to the Justicers the exceeding burden of my sins. They would not listen to me. Some said, I had invented the tale to save thee, since thou wast in league with me; others, that women played with pity as they did with men; others again, that grief for my husband had robbed me of my senses. They would not hear me, and when I swore on the Book, I was sent to the physician. Ten against one; ten they are, thy life is in their power. Folk call me Duchess of Padua, though whether I be so still, I cannot tell. I have pardoned thee, and they have reversed my act, declaring 'tis treason what I have decreed,—mayhap it is. In an hour they will be here to hale thee from thy cell and bind thy hands behind thy back and drag thee to the block,—I have forerun them. Here is the signet-ring of Padua, it will bring thee safe past the watch; now take mask and cloak, they have orders to ask no questions. Once through the prison doors, turn to the left, and at the second bridge horses await thee—at morn thou shalt be at Venice. [*A pause.*] Thou wilt not speak, wilt not once curse me, ere thou goest? Thou hast good right to.

Dost not comprehend that 'twixt thee and the scaffold scarce so much sand in the hour-glass is left to run as a child's fist holds. Here is the ring, the hand is clean; no blood cleaves to it. Have no fear! Wilt thou not take the ring?

GUIDO

[*Takes it and kisses it.*] Willingly, noble Lady.

BEATRICE

And leave Padua?

GUIDO

How, leave Padua?

BEATRICE

This very night.

GUIDO

This very night?

BEATRICE

Thank thy God therefor.

GUIDO

Then I may live. Ne'er did life seem so alluring to me as now.

BEATRICE

Why dost delay, my Guido? Here is the cloak, at the bridge a horse,—at the toll-house yonder by the second bridge. Why wilt thou linger here? Can thine ear not catch the dreadful bell, which at each stroke shortens thy young life yet another minute? Fly, fly quickly!

GUIDO

He comes not speedily enough.

BEATRICE

Who?

GUIDO

[*Calmly.*] Why, the headsman!

BEATRICE

Nay, nay, say not that.

GUIDO

He alone can bring me out of Padua.

BEATRICE

What, thou dar'st, dar'st burden my overburdened soul with two dead men; one, one is enough! For when I stand before my God, eye to eye, thou must not, thou shalt not, with a red

thread about thy white neck, step forward and accuse me, so that the very devils that howl in hell should pity me. Wilt thou be harder-hearted than the devils God banishes from heaven!

GUIDO

I stay here, noble Lady.

BEATRICE

Nay, nay, thou canst not. Dost not understand I have less power now in Padua than any girl. They will kill me. I have just seen the scaffold in the open Square; already the rabble was pressing round it with cruel jests and lust of horrors, as though it were the stage of some masquerade and not the melancholy throne of death. Oh Guido, thou must fly.

GUIDO

Yea, by the hand of death, but not by thine.

BEATRICE

Oh, thou art pitiless, as pitiless now as alway. Nay, Guido, thou must away.

GUIDO

I shall remain, noble Lady.

BEATRICE

Thou must not, Guido, it would be so dreadful else, that e'en the stars, amazed and horrified, would fall from heaven, that the moon would be stopped and darkened in her path, and the sun cease to shine upon the earth that saw thy death.

GUIDO

I will not give way.

BEATRICE

[*Wringing her hands.*] Thou dost not know this, that once the Justicers are come, I am powerless to shield thee from the axe. As if I had not done outrage enow already! Will one sin not suffice? Must it engender yet another sin worse than the first crime? Oh God, shut up the womb that mothers sin, dry it up, and never more shall blood stain my hand, as it did but now.

GUIDO

[*Taking her hand.*] How, am I fallen so low, I should begrudge to die for thee?

BEATRICE

[*Drawing away her hand.*] For me? My life is a worthless thing, that hath been tossed out

into the street mud of the world. Thou must not die for me, thou shalt not, Guido; I am a sinful woman.

GUIDO

Let them who know not what temptation is, let them who have not walked like us in the furnace-fire of passion, and whose life is tedious and colourless, in a word all them, if such there be, who have never loved, let them cast stones at us.

BEATRICE

Woe is me, ah, woe is me!

GUIDO

[*Throwing himself at her feet.*] Thou art my life, my highest, truest joy! Oh golden hair, oh purple mouth, oh cheeks framed to allure man's love! Incarnate image of loveliness! To thee doing homage, I forget all that hath been; to thee doing homage, my soul touches thine; to thee doing homage, I feel myself a God. Albeit my body come to the headsman's block, yet doth my love live for aye.

[*The Duchess holds her hands before her face, Guido draws them away.*] Lift the drooping

curtains of thine eyes, that I may look in them and say,—I love thee, and never more than when Death presses his cold lips betwixt us. I love thee, Beatrice,—thine answer? Woe is me! I can well endure the headsman, but not this silence; say thou lovest me. This one word, and Death hath no sting left; but an thou say it not, fifty thousand deaths are then a mercy. Thou art cruel, thou dost not love me.

BEATRICE

I have no right to. Love's hands of innocence are stained with blood vilely shed,—here on the ground is blood, sprinkled there by me.

GUIDO

Nay, love, not by thee; only a devil tempted thee.

BEATRICE

[*Springing up.*] No, no, each one is his own devil, and himself turns the world into a hell.

GUIDO

Then sink Paradise to Tartarus! For now I hold this world a heaven a brief while. I love thee, Beatrice.

BEATRICE

Tainted with the plague of sin, I am not worthy of thee.

GUIDO

By the Redeemer, the sin was mine, if sin there were. I nurtured murder in my heart, sweetened my meat therewith, flavoured my wine, in thought I struck down the accursed Duke an hundred times a day. Had the man died only half so often as I wished, Death would have been stalking for ever through the house, Murder would have never rested. But thou, Beloved, thou who looked with ruth upon the whipped hound, thou at whose gaze children's faces brightened, because where thou didst pass, sunshine went with thee, thou gentle angel of white, holy purity, what was it men call thy sin?

BEATRICE

What was it? Oft it seems to me a dream, an evil dream sent by an evil demon; but then, I see the corpse within its coffin, and know it is no dream, know that my hand is red with blood; and my poor soul, on the voyage to a love's haven 'gainst the wild tempest of this mad world, hath wrecked her bark on the rock of sin.

What was it, thou dost ask,—only a murder, naught else but murder, horrid murder.

GUIDO

Nay, never, never; 'twas but the painful blossom of thy love, that in a moment burst into bloom, and in a moment's passion bare a bloody fruit, such as in thought myself had plucked a thousand times. My mind was full of murder, but my arm was weak; thy arm committed murder, but thy mind was innocent. I love thee for it, Beatrice; who refuses pity for thy distress, may he find no compassion in Heaven. Kiss me, sweet!

[*Tries to kiss her.*]

BEATRICE

Nay, nay, thy mouth is pure, mine sullied; my paramour was murder, and sin slept in my bed. Guido, an thou lov'st me, fly, fly; for every moment gnaws at thy life like a deadly worm. Beloved, fly, and if in later days thou dost remember me, think of me as of one who loved thee better than all else in the world; as of a woman, Guido mine, who was fain to offer up her life for her love, and thereby slew her love.—What

is't now? the bell hath fallen dumb, and up the stairs I hear the tread of armed men coming.

GUIDO

[*Aside.*] The signal for the watch to hale me forth.

BEATRICE

Why hath it stopped ringing?

GUIDO

Must thou know? For this side the grave, my life ends here,—beyond the tomb we shall see each other again.

BEATRICE

It is not yet too late; fly hence, the horse stands ready by the bridge, there yet is time. Away, away, thou must not tarry longer.

[*Noise of soldiers in the corridor.*]

A VOICE FROM WITHOUT

Make way for the Chief Justiciar of Padua!

[*Through the barred window the Chief Justiciar is seen passing along the passage, torch-bearers preceding him.*]

BEATRICE

It is too late.

A VOICE FROM WITHOUT

Make way for the Headsman!

BEATRICE

[*Throwing herself down.*] Oh!

[*The Executioner, axe on shoulder, appears in the corridor, Monks carrying tapers behind him.*]

GUIDO

Farewell, my love, I drink the poison here. I fear not the headsman; only this, I will not die upon the block.

BEATRICE

Oh!

GUIDO

Nay, rather here, here in thy arms, betwixt two kisses,—farewell! [*Goes to the table, and seizes the cup.*] What, art empty? [*Tosses it on the floor.*] Oh niggardly gaoler, thou dost begrudge even thy poison.

BEATRICE

[*In a weak voice.*] No blame belongs to him.

GUIDO

Oh God, hast thou drunk it, Beatrice! tell me, thou hast not done that!

BEATRICE

An I were to lie, there burns a fire at my heart that will soon proclaim the truth.

GUIDO

Traitorous love, why didst leave me never a drop over?

BEATRICE

Nay, nay, there was death only for me in the cup.

GUIDO

Let me taste the dainty poison from thy lips; mayhap some still lingers there.

BEATRICE

Thou art not to die, thou hast shed no blood, thou art not to die; 'tis I have shed blood, and I must die. Stands not the word writ: Blood for blood? Who said so? I cannot remember.

GUIDO

Wait for me, our souls will depart together.

BEATRICE

Nay, live! There be many women left in the world ready for love, not murder, for thy sake.

GUIDO

Thee only do I love.

BEATRICE

That is no good ground for dying.

GUIDO

An if we die together, why cannot we rest together in one tomb?

BEATRICE

The grave is but a narrow marriage bed.

GUIDO

It will suffice for us.

BEATRICE

They shall bedeck it with stiff cere-cloth and bitter herbs; for roses, methinks, spring not in the grave, and if any there be, they are all withered, since the Duke died.

GUIDO

Ah Beatrice, thy mouth wears roses that do defy Death.

BEATRICE

Will not my mouth, when as we lie in the grave, fall all to dust, thy bright eyes shrink to blind holes, and worms, our marriage-guests, gnaw at thy heart?

GUIDO

What matter? Death doth react on love,—and through love's eternal majesty I die with thee.

BEATRICE

But the grave is dark, the tomb is dark; wherefore must I go first to light the tapers ere thou come. Nay, nay, I will not die, will not die. Beloved, thou art strong, and young and brave! Defend me when the Angel of Death draws near, and wrestle with him for me! [*Pushing Guido forward.*] I will kiss thee, when thou hast vanquished him. Hast thou no way to stay the poison that doth rage within me? Are there no rivers left in all Italy? Bring me a beaker of water and put out this burning fire!

GUIDO

Oh God!

BEATRICE

Why didst thou never tell me that in Italy all is desert dryness,—no water anywhere, only fire?

GUIDO

Beloved!

BEATRICE

Send for the physician, but not for him who staunched my husband's blood. Fetch a physician instantly! There is for every poison an antidote, he will sell it us for a great price. Tell him, for one short hour of life Padua shall be his guerdon. I will not die. I am sick to death. Touch me not, poison gnaws at my vitals. I never knew it was such pain to die. Life, methought, had taken all the heart's agony for itself. It seems 'tis not so.

GUIDO

Accursed stars, quench ye your torches in tears, and bid your mistress, the moon, to pale her beams to-night.

BEATRICE

What do we here, Beloved? This room is poorly furnished forth for a bridal chamber. Come, let us begone at once. Where are the horses? By now we should be half way to

Venice. How cold the night is! Let us ride faster! Are not these our wedding bells, Guido?

[*Outside the Monks begin their chants.*]

Music! It might be merrier; but melancholy is now the fashion,—why I cannot tell. Why dost weep? Do we not love each other? Naught else is needed. Death, what seek'st thou here? Thou wert never asked to this feast; away, thou dost intrude. I tell thee, I drank thy health in wine, and not in poison. They lied who said I had drunk up thy poison; it was spilt on the ground, like my husband's blood,—thou hast come too late.

GUIDO

There's nothing here, sweetheart; these be but unsubstantial phantoms.

BEATRICE

Death, why dost thou tarry here? Go to the upper chamber, there stands prepared for thee the cold meats of my Consort's funeral feast; here 'tis a marriage banquet. Thou hast gone astray. Beside, 'tis summer now, we need not so fierce a fire; thou art scorching us. Guido, bid the sextons have done with digging of this empty grave. I will not be entombed therein.

I burn, consume, melt in the inward glow; canst do naught to help me? Water, give me water, but no more poison.—Ha, now the pain is past; how strange, I feel no pain. Death is gone, how glad I am thereof; methought he would fain part us. Tell me this, Guido, art sorry thou didst ever see me?

GUIDO

What had my life been without thee? In this dull, flat world many a man hath died, waiting and wishing for such a moment as this, and never found it.

BEATRICE

Thou art not sorry then? How strange it seems!

GUIDO

Have I not fed mine eyes on beauty? That is joy enow for a man's life. I could jest for very merriment; at many a feast I have sat sadder; who can be sad at such a feast as this, where Death and Love are our cup-bearers? We are made one in love and death.

BEATRICE

I have been guilty above all women, and therefore punished above all women. What dost truly think,—'tis not possible,—can love wipe away the blood from off my hands, pour balsam in my wounds, heal my scars, and wash my scarlet sins as white as snow? I have sinned much.

GUIDO

Who sins for love, sins not.

BEATRICE

I have sinned, and yet mayhap shall I be forgiven. I have loved much.

[*They kiss each other for the first time in this Act. Suddenly the Duchess springs up in a fearful death spasm, tears at her clothing in her agony, and finally falls back on her seat, her face wrung and distorted with pain. Guido takes the dagger from her girdle, kills himself with it, then as he falls across her knees, drags down the cloak hanging over the back of the chair, and covers her completely with it. A short pause. Then the trampling of soldiers in the corridor, the door opens, the Chief Justiciar, the Execu-*

tioner and the Watch enter, and see the black muffled shape and Guido lying athwart it. The Chief Justiciar rushes forward and draws away the cloak from the Duchess, whose countenance is now the marble image of Peace,—showing that God has forgiven her.]

CURTAIN.

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